





OBSERVATIONS  
ON  
HERESY AND ORTHODOXY.

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BY THE  
REV. JOSEPH BLANCO WHITE.

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"I have heard frequent use (said the late Lord Sandwich, in a debate on the Test Laws) of the words Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy; but I confess myself at a loss to know precisely what they mean."—"Orthodoxy, my Lord (said Warburton, in a whisper), Orthodoxy is *my* doxy; Heterodoxy is *another man's* doxy."—*Priestley's Memoirs*, vol. i, p. 372, note.

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LONDON  
J. MARDON, 19, ST. MARTIN'S LE GRAND.

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1835.

**COMPTON & RITCHIE, PRINTERS, MIDDLE STREET, CLOTH FAIR, LONDON.**



## P R E F A C E.

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THE publication of the following Letters has been prepared by a most painful sacrifice of happiness on the part of the writer. Convinced that it is my duty publicly to dissent from some doctrines upon which the Orthodox seem to consider themselves as incapable of mistake (else they would not treat those that deny them as guilty of something worse than an error of judgment), I perceived the necessity and submitted to the pain of quitting the domestic society of a family, whose members shewed me an affection seldom bestowed but upon a near relative, and whom I love with all the tenderness and warmth of a heart which nature has not made either cold or insensible to kindness.

It is not my intention to court the sympathy of the public on the score of what I have had to endure on this occasion. I will not complain; though this is certainly the *second time* that ORTHODOXY has reduced me to the alternative of dissembling, or renouncing my best external means of happiness. But I humbly thank God, that the love of honesty and veracity which He implanted in my soul, has been strengthened, constantly and visibly, from the moment that, following its impulse, I quitted my native country. From that time to the present—a period of five-and-twenty years—every day seems to have made me more and more obedient to the principle, *not to deceive either by word or deed*. To countenance *externally* the profession of what *internally* I am convinced to be injurious to the preservation and further spread of Christ's true Gospel, would be a conduct deserving bitter remorse and utter self-contempt.

It has been urged by persons whom I believe incapable of recommending dissimulation, and who have besides expressly acknowledged to me the duty of obeying conscience, that the step I had resolved to take would destroy what, in the language of partial affection, they called my former usefulness. I can easily explain to myself this suggestion, from the nature of that religious belief which, being chiefly, or in a great degree, supported by *fear* of a great sin, supposed to be attached to certain *heresies* (as they are called), prevents even the ablest men from going through a *free* and *impartial* examination of those subjects. As if it were incredible that any reasonable man could give his assent to such theological views, my excellent and kind advisers seem to have believed me under some mental *delusion*; else they would not have urged motives which ought not to have the least weight against *conviction*.

Unconscious, however, as I am of any thing like delusion, but, on the contrary, enjoying the full and calm satisfaction which an evidence, long resisted by mere *FEELING*, is apt to produce when the mind honestly surrenders itself to its power, I feel no anxiety about consequences. I commit my past services in the cause of Truth (whatever they may be) to the care of that Providence, which, if in fact I have been useful, must have employed me, though a humble instrument. Of *consequences* we are very incompetent judges: on *principles* alone can we depend with confidence and certainty. If the consideration of *usefulness* could be allowed in my case, *SPAIN*, my native country, would long, long since, have had my services. But *dissembling*, whether in deference to *Transubstantiation* or the *Athanasian Creed*, is equally hateful to me.

Yet, why any real good of which I may have been the occasion should be destroyed by a fresh proof of my love of honesty and fair dealing, is what I cannot conceive. If any thing could invalidate or weaken the force of my testimony in regard to the

corruptions of Popery, it would be my SILENCE in favour of what I deem other corruptions. The great *Chillingworth* would have added weight to his unrivalled works, if he had not permitted his subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles to remain in full force, when neither his judgment could approve of it nor his natural honesty conceal his change. As to myself, I have not enjoyed any of the temporal advantages of Orthodoxy; and it is well attested, that, at a time when I might conscientiously have taken preferment, I solemnly resolved never to accept it. But, having subscribed to the Articles for the mere purpose of qualifying myself for the *occasional* performance of clerical duties, I feel bound modestly to recall that subscription before my death; and to declare that I am satisfactorily convinced, not only that the DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY is not scriptural, but also that the whole *Patristical* theology, which makes up the greatest part of the Thirty-nine Articles, consists of groundless speculations which could never have obtained currency among Christians without the aid of a false philosophy. I profess Christianity as a UNITARIAN; acknowledging ONE GOD IN ONE PERSON, and Jesus of Nazareth as my guide to *His Father* and *my father*, *His God* and *my God*.

In announcing such changes of views, it is usual to state *how* they have taken place. To describe, however, the circumstances of my case fully, would require a work much larger than the Tract which affords me the opportunity of making my sentiments known. Such an undertaking is quite beyond my present strength. How long, how earnestly, and I may add (for who except God can know it better than myself?) how conscientiously, I have examined the whole *Patristical* theology, of which the Articles of the Church of England are a summary, will be known, *in detail*, when the SKETCH OF MY MIND IN ENGLAND may happen to see the light. Out of respect, however, to such persons as may take an interest in the subject, I will mention—(1) That

my doubts of the truth of the established views began with the systematic and devout study of the Scriptures which I undertook in 1814, when, free from the literary engagements which in the service of England as well as of my native country had occupied me during the four preceding years, I removed to Oxford, for the exclusive purpose of devoting myself to theology. In the year 1818 (as it may be distinctly proved by the journals I kept at that time, and which are still in my possession) I arrived at the Unitarian view of Christianity; but the perfect obscurity in which I was living, and the consideration that I had not then published any thing, except in Spanish, appeared to me a sufficient ground for not making a public avowal of my conviction.

(2) Having, till about 1824, continued in that state, and, in spite of difficulties, resulting from the notion of Orthodoxy, faithfully attached to Christianity, a revival of my early mental habits, and of those devotional sentiments which are inseparably connected with the idea of intellectual surrender to some church, induced me again to *acquiesce* in the established doctrines—not from conviction, not by the discovery of sounder proofs than those which I had found insufficient, but chiefly by the power of that sympathy which tends to assimilation with those we love and respect. To an excess of that tendency, opposed by the unyielding temper of my understanding, I trace some of my most severe moral sufferings. Nevertheless, I have cause to rejoice, when I consider that since my present convictions have had to struggle, for many years, against that weakness of my heart,—since they have triumphed over it, not only in the most perfect absence of all acquaintance with any Unitarians, but while I was surrounded by the most devout believers in the divinity of Christ—the reasons which have moved me cannot have derived any assistance from personal affection and partiality. But to proceed: not long after my strong attachment to many orthodox and highly religious persons had revived and given full sway to my deeply-seated

habits of attachment to a *church* (habits which, when it is remembered that, from the age of fourteen, I belonged to the most compact and best organized body of clergy which ever existed, must be found quite natural), my reason resumed its operations against the system which I had thus *wilfully* re-embraced; and my mental anxiety, growing every day more intolerable, brought on the most severe aggravation of my long and painful disease that I ever experienced before.

I had not yet at that time settled, to my entire satisfaction, the important point which forms the subject of the following Letters. I had long been convinced, that most of the questions which so hopelessly divide the church of Christ, are not essential to Christianity. I knew that the distinction between *essential* and *non-essential* articles of faith must be arbitrary, since there is no certain rule to distinguish them. But I had not fully made the application of that fact—the absence of a rule not subject to rational doubt—nor found, as I did soon after, that the absence of every rule of dogmatic faith is in perfect conformity with the tenour and spirit of the New Testament. As I had not yet obtained this conviction, and was not indifferent about my duty to God, I could not but feel distressed, when, still under a remnant of those early impressions of identity between *saving faith* and *right opinions*, I found my Orthodoxy crumbling to dust, day by day. I may add, with perfect truth, that my distress was increased by my real attachment to the Church of England, from which I feared I should find it necessary to separate myself. Nor is it difficult to explain the source of that attachment.

Abhorrence of the persecuting spirit which made me renounce my native country, is, perhaps, the most active sentiment of my heart. It was natural, therefore, that as soon as I became acquainted with the most powerful antagonist which Popery had ever met, I should cling to it with my whole heart. The Church

of England was to me what I conceive the *Maltese* knights must have been to a Christian slave who had escaped from the prisons of Algiers into one of the Order's galleys. A long experience must have been necessary, both to myself and the subject of my illustration, to make us perceive that neither of our places of refuge was the dwelling of the full liberty we sought. But regarding the Church of England (as it really has been for a long period) in the character of one of the most powerful opponents of the encroachments of Rome, my eyes were too dazzled to perceive the essential defects of her constitution and the narrowness of her toleration, till the events of the year 1829 disabused me, not without resistance and pain on my part.

The last fact I shall state is, that in my anxiety to avoid a separation from the Church by the deliberate surrender of my mind to my old Unitarian convictions, I took refuge in a modification of the Sabellian theory, and availed myself of the *moral* Unity which I believe to exist between God the Father and Christ, joined to the consideration that Christ is called in the New Testament the *Image* of God, and addressed my prayers to God as appearing in that image. I left nothing untried to cultivate and encourage this feeling by devotional means. But such efforts of mere feeling (and I confess with shame their frequency on my part for the sake of what seemed *most religious*) were always vain and fruitless. Sooner or later my reason has not only frustrated, but punished them. In the last-mentioned instance, the *devout* contrivance would not bear examination. Sabellianism is only Unitarianism disguised in words; and as for the worship of an *image* in its absence, the idea is most unsatisfactory. In this state, however, I passed five or six years; but the return to the clear and definite Unitarianism in which I had formerly been, was as easy as it was natural. An almost accidental (if the result had been to make me a Trinitarian, most people would call it *providential*) correspondence with a

gentleman (then personally unknown to me, and whom subsequently I have seen but once) who had some years ago resigned his preferment to profess himself a Unitarian, took place during part of last summer and part of the ensuing winter. This was the *occasion* of my becoming aware of the flimsiness of the veil which had long somewhat concealed from me the real state of my religious belief. This flimsy veil once torn, I had no difficult theological questions to examine: they had all been settled before. Whether I was to continue apparently a member of the Establishment, was a point on which I could not hesitate a moment. For the greatest part of more than twenty years I had employed all my powers, in a manner hardly justifiable except on enthusiastic principles, with the object of continuing in the Church. My only excuse for this, must be found in the religious habits which I deeply imbibed in youth. I do not absolutely reproach myself for having so long indulged the disinterested sympathies which made me linger in connexion with the Church, when my understanding had fully rejected her principal doctrines: at all events, I derive from that fact the satisfaction of being assured, that, far from having embraced Unitarianism in haste, the only fault of which I cannot clear myself is, that of reluctance and dilatoriness to follow my conviction in its favour.

As the long and close friendship which I have had with many distinguished members of the clergy is generally known, I must add, in justice to them all, that their influence over me has uniformly acted against the settlement of the views I profess. Without exception, all and every one of them are, to my knowledge, conscientious believers in the divinity of Christ. It might be supposed that I had discussed with those nearest to me the subjects which so long and so fully have occupied my mind. But it is not so. It may be a fault in me, but I have always disliked *consultation* as a means of deciding questions respecting which all whatever can be said for either side, is within the

reach of every one. Discussion upon such points appears to me the most unlikely method of satisfying oneself. Argumentative discussion on the divinity of Christ is particularly apt to allure the mind into the snares of verbal criticism concerning individual passages. That subject, on the contrary, should be settled by means of the *collective* impression conveyed by the writings of the New Testament ; preceded, however, by a careful examination of the preconceived notions by which education has prepared us all to attach the orthodox meaning to certain leading words and phrases of Scripture. This is the great difficulty. We are brought up under the most deliberate *party prejudices*, sanctioned by the most awful spiritual fears. Unless, therefore, our first care is to examine their real worth, the unassisted reading of the Scriptures must mislead us. To refer a Trinitarian in doubt to the Scriptures *only*, has, indeed, a great air of candour ; but if the person thus sent to that supreme but mute authority has been most assiduously taught to understand it only in one sense, and kept in perfect ignorance of all that has and may be said to prove *that* sense erroneous, his mental associations leave him no choice : it is like inviting a man to venture his all upon dice which have been previously clogged, and shaming him, on the score of impartiality, from listening to those who engage to shew him where the trick lies. Nevertheless, in my own case, I solemnly declare that I employed no Unitarian works to counterbalance the prejudices of my education. I never read any defence of Unitarianism, till, in 1818, the study of the New Testament *alone*, had made me a Unitarian.

I trust I may still venture to add a few words respecting what I have experienced and observed since I fairly and honestly began to act in full conformity with my conviction. Having never before been in any dissenting place of worship whatever, and conceiving from what I had heard that the absence of a regular



Liturgy in all, and that of real devotion in those of Unitarians, made them quite offensive to persons accustomed to the Church service, I strongly feared I should be obliged to follow Milton's example, and abstain from public worship. Wishing, however, to satisfy myself by personal observation, I went, soon after my arrival in this town of Liverpool, to one of the Unitarian chapels. The effect which the service produced upon me was recorded in my private journal as soon as I returned to my lodgings; but the passage is too long to be inserted here. Suffice it to declare, as I do in the most solemn manner, that I never enjoyed a more devout and sublime impression than I received there. My almost constantly repeated attendance has not weakened the effect of the truly sublime Unitarian worship with which I have become acquainted. I have since attended divine worship in another chapel of the same denomination; and the original impression has been confirmed. Sunday, which owing to the constant struggle of my mind at church, and the frequent internal rejection of passages in the Liturgy, was formerly to me a day of pain and suffering, is now one of enjoyment. The admirable combination of beautiful hymns, with prayers no less beautiful, and a sermon, in which I have hitherto never failed to find instruction and support to my religious feelings, all contribute to make me enjoy the service of the Lord's Day. I must add, that I have never joined congregations in which attention and devotion were more visible in all, including the numerous charity children who attend the service. It is a great misfortune that the spirit of Orthodoxy stands like "a great gulph fixed" between Churchmen and Unitarians. Could impartial good men "come and see," though they might remain attached to their opinions, they would be certainly delivered from a multitude of most uncharitable prejudices.

I conclude by protesting against the supposition, that the following little work is intended as a defence of Unitarianism.

In it I certainly make use of my Unitarian views for argument and illustration ; but I do that incidentally, and almost exclusively, in the last Letter. Unitarianism is not in want of any new defence ; nor would I waste my time in entering upon a question through which every one may find his way, provided he chooses to examine candidly what is already within the reach of every one : I shall not, therefore, consider myself bound to answer any Anti-Unitarian observations which may be directed against me. I do not fear that my declining a controversy, for which my constant ill health particularly unfits me, may injure the cause of Unitarianism. I beg leave to refer any champion of Orthodoxy, who may be inclined to stand in defence of the Athanasian doctrine, to try what he can do against the works already in existence. I particularly refer controversial divines to "A VINDICATION OF UNITARIANISM, and SEQUEL," by the Rev. James Yates ; and to the recent work of Professor Norton, of Cambridge, U. S., entitled "A STATEMENT OF REASONS FOR NOT BELIEVING THE DOCTRINES OF TRINITARIANS CONCERNING THE NATURE OF GOD AND THE PERSON OF CHRIST."

J. B. W.

*Liverpool, June 20, 1835.*

# C O N T E N T S.

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## LETTER I.

	Page.
A HISTORY of the <i>Inquisition</i> worse than useless if not preceded by a true definition of <i>Heresy</i> .....	2
Some latent error in the usual phrase <i>Christian truth</i> .....	3
Only true sense of the phrase <i>Christian truth</i> .....	4, 5
True meaning of the word <i>Heresy</i> , as used among Christians.....	5
Question on which the necessary existence of some degree of interference, like that claimed by the Papal Inquisition, or the absence of that claim, depends .....	5, 6, note
Protestantism, on the basis of Orthodoxy, untenable .....	6
Unanswerable arguments of the Roman Catholics against such Protestantism .....	7
Unanswerable arguments of the unbelievers against that Protestantism	8
If Christ and his Apostles, by <i>saving faith</i> , understood Orthodoxy, Christianity cannot be true.....	9
Proofs that such was not Christ's and Apostles' meaning of <i>faith</i> ....	10
True meaning of the word <i>faith</i> .....	11
No judge of Orthodoxy appointed.....	12
Union of Christians not dependent on unity of abstract doctrines....	ib.
Obvious means of establishing unity of doctrine on abstract points, if Christ had intended it, as the bond of his disciples.....	12, 13
What must men agree upon to be Christians.....	13, 14
What kind of men are excluded by St. Paul and St. John.....	15
Acceptance of Christ as supreme religious guide, the original condition of Christian communion.....	16
Natural sources of error connected with the only essential condition of Christian communion .....	ib.
Paul's notion of <i>Heresy</i> : exposition of part of 1st Cor. iii.....	17

---

## LETTER II.

Theological writers who do not follow the scholastic phraseology, in constant danger of being misunderstood.....	21
Passions which disturb the judgment of the generality of people attached to some theological system.....	22

	Page
Main argument of Letter I collectively stated .....	23, 26
Call of the Gospel made to the <i>will</i> .....	27
Essential difference between such a call and one made upon the <i>understanding</i> , especially in relation to the interpretation of language....	28
Unadulterated Christianity in perfect harmony with the nature of our moral being .....	28, 29
The <i>understanding</i> not morally responsible .....	30, 31
Translation of 1st Cor. xiii, 12, corrected .....	31, note
Duty of <i>veracity</i> , 32—Christians should not deceive each other as to the results of their respective perceptions of the sense of the Scriptures, 33—Advantages which Christianity would derive from a general faithfulness to the duty of <i>veracity</i> , 33, 34.	
Unjustifiable methods of perpetuating certain interpretations of Scripture .....	34, 35
The <i>established orthodoxies</i> of the Christian world prevent our knowing the sense of the Scripture according to a successive and comparative experience of the various generations of Christians.....	36
What the Church of Christ might be if its growth had not been perverted by Orthodoxy.....	37
<i>Orthodoxy</i> has placed the world in a worse condition for peace and charity than it was before the Gospel.....	38
The reason of this explained .....	39
Gospel liberty .....	41
Mark xvi, 16—Matt. x, 14, 15, explained .....	41, note
Paul's notions of Christian liberty .....	42
Connexion of the words SPIRIT and LIBERTY, in the New Testament	44

---

### LETTER III.

Necessity of keeping in mind what has been proved, that <i>Heresy</i> , in the usual sense of the word, cannot exist unless there exists a divinely appointed judge of controversies.....	46
Difficulty of uprooting errors arising from misapplied texts of Scripture .....	47
Method of avoiding great mistakes in the interpretation of the New Testament .....	48
The sense of passages relating to speculative subjects cannot be obvious	ib.
Erroneous notions inculcated in early life make them less obvious than they might be.....	49
Certain passages of the New Testament recommended for the purpose of overcoming those mental habits.....	ib.
The 3d chapter of 2d Epistle to the Corinthians explained....	50, 51, 52

## CONTENTS.

XV

Page

That chapter opposed to the notion of Orthodoxy as necessary to salvation .....	53
The Scriptures were not appointed to be the rule of that pretended condition of salvation.....	54, 55, 56
The Scriptures addressed to <i>reason</i> as it resides in man .....	58, 59
<i>Reason</i> , as derived from God, is the "light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world".....	ib.
The "carnal mind, which is enmity against God," is the opposite of <i>reason</i> .....	60
"Let us not therefore judge one another" .....	61

---

## LETTER IV.

Scriptural signification of the word <i>Heresy</i> .....	62
Early causes of the misapplication of that word.....	63
Christianity taken up by speculatists as a basis for their theories.....	64, 65
St. Paul's rivals belonged to the class of Judeo-philosophical speculatists .....	66
Proof of the former assertion in the character of Apollos .....	66, 67
Utility of abstract doctrines, for the purpose of maintaining the self-importance of nominal Christian preachers.....	68
A specimen of the early sources of speculative corruptions.....	68, 69
Some of the subsequent speculations, comparatively, not less absurd .....	70
The Gospel, without Orthodoxy, what? .....	71, 72
Power which Christian teachers derive from the supposed necessity of Orthodoxy .....	73
The notion of <i>saving</i> Orthodoxy necessarily intolerant .....	74
Steps by which the apostolical condemnation of <i>dissension</i> was transferred to <i>dissent</i> .....	ib.
Historical traces of early toleration among Christians.....	74, 75, 76
Organized tyranny of the Bishops which soon followed.....	77

---

## LETTER V.

Reason charged with sin among Protestants.....	78
What can <i>pride of reason</i> be? .....	78, 79, 80
Why most languages want a word to express the virtuous feeling of which <i>pride</i> , in the common sense of that word, is an excess.....	81
<i>Pride of reason</i> defined .....	82
<i>Pride of reason</i> absurdly supposed to be a rebellion of reason against God, 82—Mistake in which that notion originates, 83	
Who are really guilty of <i>pride of reason</i> .....	84

	Page
<i>Pride of sight</i> , an illustration .....	84, 85
Those who identify their own explanations of Scripture with the word of God are guilty of pride of reason.....	86, 87
The spirit of Orthodoxy inseparable from <i>pride of reason</i> .....	87
The <i>Trinitarians</i> and the <i>Unitarians</i> compared in regard to <i>pride of reason</i> .....	87, 88
Reluctance to believe what is directly against the first principles of reason, mistaken for <i>pride</i> .....	89
The New Testament compared with the orthodox system, in regard to <i>reasonableness</i> .....	89, 90, 91, 92, 93
The orthodox doctrines cannot be divested of their verbal mysteriousness without the <i>appearance</i> of scorn.....	94, 95
Fallacy of comparing the mysteries of <i>Orthodoxy</i> and the mysteries of <i>Nature</i> .....	95, 96
Difference between mysteries <i>to be explained</i> and <i>mysteries to be proved</i> .....	97
Dangerous position of orthodox Protestants, who cherish the root of Popery.....	98, 99

---

#### APPENDIX I.

Extracts from Professor Norton's Statement .....	101
--	-----

---

#### APPENDIX II.

A passage from Archdeacon Blackburne's <i>Confessional</i> .....	110
--	-----

---

#### APPENDIX III.

On the Old Testament as a supposed standard of Orthodoxy .....	115
--	-----

---

#### NOTES.

On 2d John, 7-11 .....	119
On the spiritual assistance promised by Christ .....	120

# OBSERVATIONS, &c.

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## LETTER I.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

YOU desire to have a compendious history of Heresy, and of the various means which have been employed by Christians to prevent it. Since, a few years ago, I undertook to write a history of the Inquisition, I have never lost sight of that subject. My daily reading has generally had some reference to it; and there are copious notes among my papers which attest how earnestly I have wished to accomplish the intended work. Were it not an historical task, and, consequently, one which demands research, I believe that, in spite of a broken constitution, I should not have found it (as has hitherto happened) totally above my power. But an old man, nearly confined to his room, cannot by dint of industry and perseverance supply the want of an extensive library of reference; and, as I see no immediate probability of removing this difficulty, I much fear that either my remaining mental activity, or my life, will be at an end before I can write my intended History of the Inquisition.

Yet I am extremely anxious not to drop into my grave without imparting to my fellow-christians what I consider the most important part of the proposed work. I am convinced, that in vain should I accumulate narratives of horrors perpetrated by the various authorities to which we may, collectively, give the name of *Inquisition*, unless I defined the object against which their efforts have been directed. The awful realities of those efforts crowd upon my mind the moment that the name *Inquisition* is uttered; yet one full half of my subject assumes the character of a shadow every time I attempt to place it before me. What is *Heresy*? I well know the sufferings which this word has oc-

casioned to millions of individuals who gloried in the name of Christians. I know that among the sources of bitter anguish which have sprung up in the Christian world, as distinguished from the ancient and from the still unchristianized societies, none can contend with *Heresy*. But when I ask, What is Heresy? I find no one who can give me a satisfactory answer. Can it be, then, that the torrents of tears and blood which have been shed on account of heresy have been occasioned by a phantom, a mental shadow, a mere mist of the mind?

Many, I suspect, will consider this question as totally unconnected with a history of the Inquisition, chiefly intended for the use of Protestants. Among such readers not one can be found ignorant of the meaning of heresy, as punished by that tribunal. "What (it will be said) is this speculative question to us? Let us have facts from which we may derive a clear and vivid idea of the excesses and horrors into which Roman Catholic bigotry is able to betray even sincerely pious men of that communion."

Now, if I could acquiesce in this wish, I should be attempting a worse than useless work. I cannot add any new horrors to those which, in connexion with the Inquisition, both the pen and the graver have already laid before the public. We certainly have reason to be glad that such records have not been lost. But the bare repetition of pictures so shocking and heart-rending is by no means instructive, and may be, in many cases, injurious. When dwelling upon the cruelties of the Inquisitors, such Christians as still consider it a moral duty to oppose heresy by the infliction of some kind and degree of suffering, are apt to exult in their own enlightened Christianity, and feel more and more confident that, by the mere *diminution of punishment* the act of persecuting religious error may be changed into an act of charity. But be it far from me to cherish such a delusion among Protestants, by casting unnecessary odium upon the Catholics. Yet such must be the effect of a history of the Inquisition which does not begin by settling the notions of *Heresy* and *Orthodoxy*. The Protestant's sympathy for those who have suffered in defence of his own opinions, or rather for opposing those he detests, may easily prove pernicious to both his intellect and heart.



Sympathy, when originating in the interests of a cause with which we are identified, may be gross and passionate selfishness. The usual disguise of this perverted feeling is *love of Christian truth*. The generality of Protestants are satisfied when they tell you that they abhor the Church of Rome, because she opposes *Christian truth* by persecution. But these Protestants ought to remember, that it was in defence of *Christian truth* that the Inquisitors lighted up their fires.

I foresee the inevitable result of what I have said. I know that the number of sincere Protestants who will not be shocked by this representation of the Inquisition is extremely small. On reading it, the brain of many well-meaning persons will be instantly seized with a feverish confusion, which, if encouraged by circumstances, would lead them to renew the old Smithfield scenes on the man who, calling himself a Protestant, has the boldness to assert that the Inquisition had *Christian truth* for its object. But let us consider what is that which men understand by *Christian truth*, when they accuse another of *heretical error*; in other words, what is *that* which the Catholics have thought it their duty to defend by severe punishments, and many or most of the Protestants by penalties or privations less revolting?

My fancy sets before me the immense variety of expressions by which, when these lines are laid before the public, the countenances of my readers will shew their disapprobation of the question which I have just now proposed. "What! are Christians to be asked by one who professes Christianity, what is meant by *Christian truth*? Does this writer mean to insinuate that *Christian truth* has no *real* existence?"

Still, I must insist upon having an answer to my question. For, seeing Christians shedding each others' blood during many centuries, and, even at this day, ready to draw the sword in favour of opposite doctrines, to which the various parties, respectively, give the name of *Christian truth*, I have a strong ground to believe that there is some grievous error concealed in those two words. Nor is this at all surprising. The more obvious and plain the leading terms of some questions appear, the greater the danger of their being used by the disputants in

various and even opposite senses, without the least suspicion of inaccuracy; for nothing appears more free from obscurity than words of indefinite meaning, when they become familiar.

What do divines understand by *Christian truth*? The answer, at first, appears obvious. "Christian truth (it will be said) is what Christ and his apostles knew and taught concerning salvation under the Gospel." Thus far we find no difficulty: but (let me ask again) where does this exist as an object *external* to our minds? The answer appears no less obvious than the former: "In the Bible."—Still I must ask, Is the MATERIAL Bible the Christian truth about which Christians dispute? "No: (it will be readily said) not the MATERIAL Bible, but the SENSE of the Bible."—Now (I beg to know) is the SENSE of the Bible an object *external* to our minds? Does any *sense* of the Bible, accessible to man, exist anywhere but in the mind of each man who receives it from the words he reads? The Divine Mind certainly knows in what sense those words were used; but as we cannot compare our mental impressions with that model and original of all truth, it is clear that by the *sense* of the Bible we must mean our own sense of its meaning. When, therefore, any man declares his intention to defend *Christian truth*, he only expresses his determination to defend his *own notions*, as produced by the words of the Bible. No other *Christian truth* exists for us in our present state.

I feel confident that what I have now stated is a *fact* which every reflecting person may ascertain beyond doubt, by looking into his own mind: yet I know that few will attempt the mental examination necessary for the acknowledgment of this fact. A storm of feeling will rise at the view of the preceding argument, and impassioned questions, whether Christianity is a dream—whether Christ could leave us in such a state of uncertainty—whether there is no difference between truth and error, with many others more directly pointed at myself, will bring the inquiry to the end of all theological questions—abuse, hatred, and (were it not for the protection, alas! of the great and powerful multitude who, "caring not for these things," take, nevertheless, more interest in the public peace than Gallio) severe bodily suffering, and perhaps death.

The mental *fact* which I have stated is, nevertheless, as unchangeable as the intellectual laws to which God has subjected mankind; as fixed as the means employed by God himself to address his revelation to us. The *Christian truth*, which man can make an object of defence, is an impression which exists in his own mind: it is *his own* Christian truth which he wilfully identifies with the Christian truth which is known to the Divine Mind. That each individual is bound to hold that Christian truth which he conscientiously believes to have found in the Bible; that it is the great moral duty of every man to prepare himself conscientiously for the undisturbed reception of the *impression* which he is to revere and to follow as *Christian truth*, I cannot doubt at all. I acknowledge also the duty of every man to assist others (without intrusion), as much as it may be in his power, in receiving a mental impression similar to that which he venerates as Christian truth. But it is at this point that a fierce contest arises; and the reason is this: certain men wish to force all others to reverence (at least *externally*) not the mental impression, the *sense*, which each receives from the Bible—not the conviction at which each has arrived—but the impression and conviction of some theological sect or church. The Christian truth of some privileged leaders (it is contended by every church respectively) should be recognized as Christian truth by all the world: in more accurate, because more scientific language, Christian parties, of the most different characters, have for eighteen centuries agreed only in this—that the *subjective* Christian truth of certain men should, by compulsion, be made the *objective* Christian truth to all the world: *i. e.* that the *sense* which the scriptures did at some time or other convey, or still convey, to such and such men, should be acknowledged as identical with that sense which was in the mind of the writers of the Bible; the true sense which is known to the Divine Mind.

Opposition to these various standards of Christian truth, with those who respectively adopt them, is HERESY.

The question of *Inquisition* or *no Inquisition*, among Christians, is identical with this: Has Christ, or have his Apostles, declared that the mental impression of any man or men, in

regard to Christian truth, shall be received by all, as the only *real* Christian truth\*?

That this might have been done, that Christ might have commanded that his followers should pay the same reverence to what some succession of men declared to be Christian truth, as if he himself attested it, is not only conceivable, but appears also, at first sight, a thing antecedently probable : and it is, indeed, this antecedent probability, considered in itself and without due attention to the multitude of facts that contradict it, which is the true root of *POPERY*. This very natural delusion is the main foundation of the Church of Rome ; this is the obstacle which stopped the progress of the reformation almost at once ; this is the secret power which, at different periods, and in various places, seems to make the reformation recede, and restore the ground to Popery. Protestantism, if established on the basis of

\* In a history of the *INQUISITION*, I would not use that word in any other sense but that of an authority employing means of compulsion in defence of Christianity in general, and of the doctrines considered by some denomination of Christians as exclusively those of Christ and his apostles. But in a work chiefly intended to shew that the spirit of the Roman Catholic Inquisition exists wherever the notion prevails that Orthodoxy and Saving Faith are identical, I think I may be allowed to apply the name of *Inquisition* to all the means used among Christians to prevent or check that perfect liberty of scriptural interpretation which, in my opinion, and according to the *Protestant principle*, belongs to every disciple of Christ. In this sense it appears to me unquestionable, that, if Christ had established some authority to which individuals should bow, all that class of Christians whose duty in such a case would be to *conform*, must be under some sort of *Inquisition*. Those who conceived themselves charged with the preservation of Orthodoxy would be bound to watch over the opinions of the rest ; while all such as had humbly submitted themselves to the appointed authority, would, in conformity with the tendencies of human nature, act as spies against the liberty of their bolder brethren. Is nothing of this kind to be found in this politically free country ? Is there no moral *Inquisition* in Great Britain and Ireland ? Who knows but these Letters may act as a *TEST* ?

“ A sprightly academic was one day making some free observations upon the canons before an eminent sage of the law : ‘ Beware, young man,’ says the prudent counsellor of the *holy office*, ‘ and remember that there are *starving* as well as *burning* Inquisitions.’ ”—*The Confessional*.

ORTHODOXY, *i. e.* the belief of a Rule of Faith different from individual conviction, must be annihilated between UNBELIEF and CATHOLICISM. By this supposition, by laying this treacherous foundation, Protestantism not only exposes itself to inevitable ruin, but places Christianity defenceless before the host of its opposers. If there must be an external or *objective* rule of faith, besides the words of the Bible; if the mass of Christians must submit to the decisions of another authority, by whatever name it may be described—Pope, Council, Church, Reformers—the Church of Rome can fear no rival. You may raise doubts against its supremacy; you may fill volumes with interpretations and various readings of the writings which attest the early and almost universal recognition of Rome as the centre of Christian unity; but how very few minds, if inclined to that degree of superstition which, in most cases, attends what is called a *pious character*, will not be overpowered by the pre-eminence of Rome in the Christian world?

“Doubts and objections (the Román Catholic will say) are inseparable from the most important truths. But, if a judge of controversies is to be acknowledged (as most Protestants confess), what prudent man will hesitate between one so distinguished and eminent as ours, and those which the Reformation set up? You blame us for grounding our Christian certainty on the *questionable* fact of the divine appointment of Rome to be the head of the Christian world; but can this uncertainty be compared with that which lies at the very foundations of your churches? A few divines meet, and draw up a list of theological propositions; the secular power takes them under its protection, ejects the clergy who will not submit to them; fences the Articles, for a long period, with penalties and civil disabilities, and makes them the rule of Christian faith FOR EVER\*. This is what you

\* I was not aware how recently and distinctly Parliament had decreed that the Faith of the Church of England and Ireland shall remain *for ever*, what the former Acts of the Legislature made it. But in No. CXXII of the *Edinburgh Review*, p. 506, I found the following extract from the Act of Union of England and Ireland. By the fifth article of the Act of Union, it is ruled, “That the Churches of England and Ireland, as now by law established, shall be united into one Protestant Episcopal Church, to be called

call the judgment of the Church, which to oppose is HERESY. It is Heresy now to dissent from the Thirty-nine Articles; but there was (it seems) a happy moment when the notions of a few individuals could be set up, without Heresy, against the judgment of a well-defined and well-constituted church, to which all Christians except HERETICS had, for ages, submitted their private views on Christianity."

"Settle your disputes (says the unbeliever, on the other hand), and then I will listen to your arguments in defence of Christianity. Both of you, Romanists and Protestants, offer me salvation on condition that I embrace the Christian faith. You offer me a sovereign remedy, which is to preserve me alive in happiness through all eternity; but I hear you accusing each other of recommending to the world, not a remedy but a *poison*; a poison, indeed, which, instead of securing eternal happiness, must add bitterness to eternal punishment. You both agree that it is of the *essence* of Christianity to accept certain doctrines concerning the manner in which the Divine Nature exists; the moral and intellectual condition in which man was created; our present degradation through the misconduct of our first parents; the nature of sin, and the impossibility of its being pardoned except by pain inflicted on an innocent person; the existence or non-existence of living representatives of Christ and his apostles; a church which enjoys, collectively, some extraordinary privileges in regard to the visible and the invisible world; the presence of Christ among us by means of transubstantiation, or the denial of such presence: all this, and much more, some of you declare to be contained in, and others to be opposed to, the scriptures; and even here there is a fierce contention as to whether those scriptures embrace the whole of that Christianity which is necessary for salvation, or whether tradition is to fill up a certain gap. I am, therefore, at a loss how to account for the invitation you give me. To me (the unbeliever might continue) it is quite evident that the ablest opponents of Christianity never discovered a more convincing argument against REVELATION in the United Church of England and Ireland; and the *doctrine, worship, discipline, and government* of the said United Church *shall be, and shall remain in full force FOR EVER, as the same are now by law established.*"

general, than that which inevitably arises from your own statements, and from the controversies of your churches. God (you both agree), pitying mankind, has disregarded the natural laws fixed by himself, and for a space of four thousand years, and more, has multiplied miracles for the purpose of acquainting men with the means of obtaining salvation, and avoiding eternal death, *eternal death* signifying almost universally, among you, *unending torments*. But when I turn to examine the result of this (as you deem it) *miraculous and all-wise plan*, I find it absolutely incomplete; for the whole Christian world has been eighteen centuries in a perpetual warfare (not without great shedding of blood), because Christians cannot settle what is that faith which alone can save us. Have you not thus demonstrated that the revelation of which you boast cannot be from God? Do you believe, and wish me to believe, that, when God had decreed to make a *saving truth* known to the world, he failed of that object, or wished to make Revelation a snare?"

That abundance of declamation may be used against this reasoning, no one acquainted with controversial books will doubt; but I cannot conceive how it may be met by a satisfactory answer. If saving faith implies ORTHODOXY, *i. e.* acquiescence in a certain collection of abstract deductions from the scriptures, as logically true, or properly inferred from the language of scripture, and no higher and more certain means to attain this object have been given to men by God than their individual logical powers; the discovery of saving faith has an infinite number of chances against it, in respect to each individual: to use more definite language, the chance of success in the search after saving faith, is as one to the number of sects and subdivisions of sects which now divide, and may still further subdivide, the Christian world. Could this be the plan of the All-wise and All-good for the salvation of his creatures? Could such a communication be called a REVELATION? What would it have revealed unless it were the melancholy fact, that the lovers of truth among mankind could be rendered still more unsettled, restless, and unhappy, than they were under the reign of pagan philosophy?

"You would, then, make us Papists," will be the indignant

retort. If any one becomes a Papist in consequence of my observations, the blame must be divided (though not in equal shares) between those Protestant divines who cherish the true root of popery in the supposed necessity of *orthodoxy*; and the delusion of such as can believe that the difficulty against Christianity, which arises from that supposition, is avoided by setting up an *infallible church*, without a clear and unquestionable appointment of it by God. The share of blame, however, which must fall to the Protestant divines who allow the snare of orthodoxy to lie before the feet of the laity, must be by far the greater. Within the reach, as they are, of mental freedom, and surrounded by the results of free inquiry in other branches of knowledge, they ought long since to have been struck by the mass of difficulties which the increase of knowledge accumulates, day after day, against Christianity, when it is identified with any of the scholastic theories which are embodied in the existing CONFESSIONS OF FAITH\*.

But no deep study or meditation is required, in order to be convinced that the necessity of orthodoxy for salvation is no part of the gospel of Christ. We need only notice the plain *fact*, that we have no revealed *rule* by which to ascertain, with moral certainty, which doctrines are right and which are wrong. As nothing relating to revelation can be more certainly known than the absence of such a *rule*, it must be evident to all who believe that the Gospel is the means appointed by God for our spiritual happiness, that SALVATION cannot depend on ORTHODOXY. The Gospel cannot consist in abstract doc-

\* "We may talk, then, of the sufficiency of the scriptures as we please; but while the laws establishing subscription to human formularies remain, the voice of the Articles shall alone be heard: the ignorance and superstition of mankind shall for awhile preserve the shadow of religion in our land, but its substance shall be nowhere found. *Improvements in science and the arts shall, at length, disclose the astonishing absurdity of our national faith. The scriptures shall be disbelieved, because their genuine simplicity and excellence are concealed by designing men from human view: the Articles shall be disbelieved, because they are held forth to it.*"—Dr. John Jebb, Letters on Subscription, Letter III.

I give the concluding part of the quotation in italics, to call the attention of the reader to the uncontrived coincidence of the passage in the text.



trines, about which men of equal abilities, virtue, and sincerity, are, and have always been, divided. Once establish this principle, and the objection which, on the supposition of Orthodoxy, irresistibly opposes revelation, is instantly rendered powerless.

“To what, then (it will be asked), is SAVING FAITH reduced if it does not consist in ORTHODOXY, or the belief of right doctrines?”—I answer, to an act which does not depend on the fallible understanding of man, but on his WILL, assisted by the ever ready grace of God. Since orthodox belief, without a divinely appointed judge to sanction it, is a matter of the greatest uncertainty, it is inconceivable that it should have been made the condition of eternal happiness by a merciful God. Eternal happiness must be independent of the innumerable and inculpable errors and weaknesses of the human understanding, when it employs itself upon things which, by the confession of those who propose them to be believed, are utterly *inconceivable*. The promises of the Gospel must have been attached to a MORAL, not to a LOGICAL act. It must be an act in which to fail is blameable: the failure must be not a *mistake*, but a *sin*. We cannot suppose SAVING FAITH to have its foundation in the understanding, without implying that God has made the chances of men’s salvation commensurate with the strength of their intellectual powers, as well as with their opportunities of training those powers, and of assisting them by means of acquired knowledge—a supposition perfectly untenable: for, putting aside the important consideration, that no moral responsibility can lie on the intellect, as a *faculty*; we know, by repeated experience, that men of the highest mental powers are opposed on points which most Christians deem essential. The only consistent theory of saving faith, as depending on doctrines, is that which contends for the existence of a divinely appointed judge. Could that appointment be proved, the acquiescence in the decisions of the infallible judge would be a moral act. Since, therefore, the non-existence of such a judge places us in the dilemma, that either Christianity is an imperfect work, or that saving faith does not consist in orthodoxy; every sincere believer in the Gospel, whose mental courage is not weakened by superstition, must unhesitatingly conclude,

that no error on abstract doctrines can be HERESY, in the sense of a wrong belief which endangers the soul\*.

Happily the question, whether there exists a divinely appointed judge of orthodoxy, is one which may be solved without profound learning or a prolonged discussion. The non-existence of a judge divinely appointed to remove doubts becomes a certainty the moment that the appointment itself is proved to be doubtful. We cannot, without either folly or impiety, suppose that God would attempt to remove one uncertainty by another.\* The existence of a *divinely* appointed judge of doubtful points, is fully disproved the moment that any obscurity appears in the supposed commission.

All Catholics, and most Protestants, will probably unite in the reply, that absolute certainty is inconsistent with our present state of existence. To this I answer, that, in regard to the appointment of any means to remove uncertainty, the All-wise Being could not want resources to produce in us the highest degree of moral confidence of which we are capable. But how short of that point fall the proofs which the Catholics give us of the appointment of their infallible judge? How extremely feeble are the attempts of those Protestants who wish to find a church somewhere, which, though liable to error, is nevertheless to settle our doubts, as if it were infallible! Yet such things are seriously proposed by men of talents and learning! How can we be surprised to find that a great portion of the most intelligent part of the world turns away with pity or disgust from theological writers?

But to return to our principal subject: These lamentable attempts to find a rule of Orthodoxy arise from the false notion that the union of Christians into a moral body, must depend on *unity of doctrine*. And here I wish it to be observed, that, if such unity had been intended by Providence, it might have been attained with the highest degree of moral certainty, by means of such an appointment as that which took place in the old dispensation, in regard to the Jewish priesthood. Such a method of producing unity of doctrine is not only conceivable,

\* See note at the end.

but obvious ; and, indeed, to none so obvious as to the founder of Christianity and his immediate disciples, as Jews by birth and education. It is not necessary, in this place, to appeal to the supernatural wisdom of Christ and his apostles. Even men of no uncommon capacity could not, in their circumstances, have overlooked the means employed by Moses to give UNITY to the Jewish theocracy. A solemn consecration of a POPE, and of a certain number of BISHOPS, as distinct from PRIESTS ; a formulary for keeping up a legitimate succession, and a few rules for the *external* conditions by which Christians might, at all times, know both whom they were to follow as their infallible guides, and in what circumstances those guides should be considered in a state of supernatural enlightenment, would have reduced the question of Heresy and Orthodoxy to a degree of simplicity fully adapted to the practical purpose of DOCTRINAL UNITY. Since, therefore, the true means of producing and perpetuating that unity were so obvious, and since those supposed to have been appointed have, on the contrary, proved wholly ineffectual, we must inevitably conclude, that doctrinal unity was not intended by Christ. To assert that such unity was desired by him, and that he nevertheless overlooked the obvious means by which his object might have been accomplished, is to make him inferior to any man of common penetration. The FAITH, therefore, proclaimed in the New Testament, cannot be ORTHODOXY ; the Heresy deprecated in a few places of that collection of writings, cannot be LOGICAL ERROR\*.

But, if ORTHODOXY cannot be the principle of union

\* That the word heresy was used by St. Paul in the sense of *practical dissension*, can hardly be doubted. The only writer in the New Testament who uses that word, besides St. Paul, is the author of the 2d Epistle attributed to Peter, a document whose authenticity is more than suspected by some of the best and most pious critics. In this latter passage alone it seems to mean false doctrine. But as the notion of practical dissension necessarily embraces the notion of opinion (*sense*, in Latin *placitum*), and it is clear that the divisions and disturbances, which may be expressed by the word dissension, cannot take place without the dissenting parties charging each other with *error*, the two notions have very naturally been mixed up together.

among Christians, upon what are men to agree in order to belong to the CONVOCATION\* or people of Christ? I believe that the apostle Paul has said enough to answer this question. When, by using the word *anathema*, he rejects from his spiritual society even an angel from heaven, were it possible that such a being should "preach another Gospel," he lays down the only principle, without which there can be no communion among Christians. Unhappily the word GOSPEL, like the word Faith, is constantly understood, as expressing a certain number of dogmatical articles. Owing to this perversion of the original meaning, these very passages of Paul are conceived to support the long-established notion that Orthodoxy is the only condition of Christian communion; and want of it, a sufficient cause for *anathema*. I have, however, already proved, that Orthodoxy, without a supreme judge of religious opinions, is a phantom; and since it is demonstrable that no such judge has been appointed, it clearly follows that the apostle Paul, by the name of *Gospel*, could not mean a string of dogmatic assertions. It is necessary, therefore, to ascend to the original signification of the word Gospel, if we are not to misunderstand the reason of the anathema pronounced by Paul. Let such as wish to rise above the clouds of theological prejudice, remember that the whole mystery of godliness is described by the expression "glad tidings." *Sad*, not glad tidings, indeed, would have been the apostles' preaching, if they had announced a salvation depending on *Orthodoxy*, for (as I have said before) it would have been salvation depending on chance. But salvation promised on condition of a change of mind from the love of sin to the love of God (which is *repentance*); on a surrender of the individual

\* It is very difficult to discard from the mind the wrong associations which the English word CHURCH attaches to the notion expressed by the original word *ἐκκλησία*, in Latin *ecclesia*. If *church*, as some etymologists believe, comes from a Teutonic root (kirk) of the same signification as the Latin *circus*, and the English *circle*, its signification might originally have been similar to that of *ecclesia*, in consequence of the same mental process which made *corona* a crown, a *ring*, express a collected multitude: *vulgi stante corona*. But nothing is more remote from the ideas raised in the mind by the word *church*, than this. *Convocation* seems to approach the nearest to the original signification of *ecclesia*.

will to the will of God, according to the view of that divine will which is obtained by trust in Christ's example and teaching, which is *faith*; a pardon of sins independent of harassing religious practices, sacrifices, and ascetic privations—these were “glad tidings of great joy,” indeed, to all who, caring for their souls, felt bewildered between atheism and superstition\*.

As this Gospel was, and must always be, the very essence of Christianity, to deny it, or (what amounts to the same) to substitute another in its place, must, for ever, be contradictory of the denomination CHRISTIAN. Now, it is well known, that those who had deceived Paul's Galatian converts taught the necessity of circumcision, for *that* salvation which the Gospel promised to repentance. Nothing, therefore, could be more natural, nothing more directly flowing from the commission he had received, than to declare his abhorrence of those who practically abolished the very Gospel which it was the dearest object of his life to spread. The Gospel, in fact, being one single announcement, warranted by Christ, namely, remission of sins upon repentance, and eternal life to those who embrace these “glad tidings;” to promise these same things on any other condition, is an endeavour to render the true Gospel useless to mankind.

Similar to this is the principle which the apostle John applies to some of the Gnostics. Paul pronounces anathema on any one who should preach another Gospel, which, as he declares, “is not another,” *i. e.* is no Gospel, no glad tidings at all†. John, proceeding on the same principle, applied the name of ANTICHRIST to any one who denies that Jesus is the Christ. It is, besides, of importance for the right understanding of some such expressions of St. John, to know that, of the Gnostics, who, from the notion of the natural impurity of all matter,

\* “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and *that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations.*”—Luke xxiv, 46, 47. This is the commission given to the apostles by Jesus himself.

† It is hardly necessary to observe that, by saying “which is not another,” Paul intended to say which is not a Gospel. He could certainly not mean that it was *the same*.

denied that the Messiah had a body, a considerable number embraced also the practical error, that it was the duty of those who aspired to perfection to give up the body to all kinds of impurity, out of contempt for the evil principle, the author (as they believed) of the material part of the universe. That even the common civilities of life should not be interchanged by Christians with such practical Antinomians, is perfectly consistent with a total absence of orthodox intolerance\*.

Such, as I have just described it, was the **UNITY OF THE FAITH** among the truly apostolic Christians. Let us never forget that **FAITH** means **TRUST**, and we shall readily perceive that the unity of trust, in regard to spiritual safety, must have been **UNITY OF FAITH**. The acceptance, therefore, of the "good tidings," namely, remission of sins upon repentance, and eternal life by trust in Christ, as the moral **KING** promised to the Jews, to deliver them from the condemnation of the law, and to the Gentiles, as their "light," and their "Saviour," who was to rescue them from vice and the darkness of idolatry, the acceptance of this Gospel was all that the apostles and their assistant messengers of salvation demanded. But as this belief was a living principle, bearing in itself that peculiar spirit or influence which Christ had promised to his sincere followers, it would naturally extend its activity to all the mental faculties, and make them converge their powers to that centre of the soul's new life. Studies of all kinds, especially the study of the Scriptures, would be carried on within the powerful attraction of the great truth,—Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, the Saviour or great benefactor of mankind: happiness, here and hereafter, depends upon trust in his promises, and faithfulness to his precepts. When, therefore, a point of contact between the one essential principle of Christianity, and any other result of reflection or experience, offered itself to view, it would be greedily seized for the purpose of confirming or illustrating that principle. Some of these views would have a real foundation in the one original truth of Christianity; some would be plausible or fanciful deductions, but harmless; others would be false, and

\* See note at the end.

perhaps *dangerous*, to that great truth, if followed up too closely and too logically. Yet all this was deemed consistent with the profession of real Christianity. Such is, indeed, Paul's view of the subject, as any one will find who shall study with an unprejudiced mind the third chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians.

No one acquainted with that scriptural document will deny that "the envying, strife, and divisions"—the HERESIES, in the scriptural sense of the word, which agitated the Christian society at Corinth, had their source in the peculiarities of the additional doctrines by which different teachers wished to distinguish themselves. It follows, therefore, that Paul had such doctrines in view, while he was earnestly urging his Corinthian "children in Christ" to put aside these sources of discord. Let us now attentively consider the manner in which Paul treats these differences of DOCTRINE. He certainly does not (as subsequent theologians) appeal to some supreme tribunal in the church; he does not urge his own inspiration, and the consequent duty of taking his words as divine oracles on all occasions; he does not (as many at present would expect) claim to himself the right and authority of stopping the mouth of those teachers. His words throw the clearest light on my subject. I insert them, with such transient paraphrases as, I trust, the context will support. I only beg you not to forget, that the point which the apostle had to settle was, the practical question of *variety of doctrine* in the church of Corinth.

"According to the grace of God which is given to me (he says) as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon; for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man (St. Paul proceeds) build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day (*i. e. time*) shall declare it. Because it (the work thus done by men) shall be revealed by fire (by close and searching examination, arising from the vehement contests of Christians), and the fire shall try every man's work of what

sort it is. If any man's work abide, which he hath built there-upon, he shall receive a reward (in the assistance he shall have given to the Gospel, and in God's approbation : secondary views in conformity with the foundation will stand). If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss (additional doctrines, which must perish like stubble and wood by fire, will be a loss, a fine or penalty to the injudicious preacher) ; but he himself (if he has not given up the foundation, Jesus Christ, or betrayed it for another) will be saved (will be acquitted notwithstanding his errors), yet so as by fire" (with difficulty and the loss of his labour)\*.

If such be the true meaning of this to many obscure, to others delusive, passage (and I believe the interpretation here given cannot easily be shaken), the question of orthodoxy, with all its practical difficulties, is at an end. And here let me observe, that the coincidence of my preceding argument with this remarkable passage was not at all prepared by my taking a clue from the passage itself. The inquiry which I have been pursuing began by the examination of a **NEGATIVE** fact—a kind which is ascertained with more certainty than the **POSITIVE**. I searched for the appointment of a judge of **ORTHODOXY**. A direct and definite appointment was not found ; and this is enough to establish that **NEGATIVE FACT** beyond doubt. This step enabled me to conclude that **ORTHODOXY** and **SAVING FAITH** must be two different things ; else the salvation of sincere men would have been made to depend on means attended with the greatest

\* I had originally followed what I believe is the general notion, that by *fire*, the apostle meant persecution. But taking for my guide the clear assertion that *TIME* would be the great instrument for removing the false notions which philosophical teachers were then mixing with the foundation of the Gospel, I feel pretty certain that the *fire*, which is figuratively added as the more proximate instrument of the separation, must have an analogy to *time*, in regard to the predicted effect. But if *time* can bring about the separation of *error* which has been mixed up with *truth*, it is because it allows sufficient space for discussion, and the struggle of contending views. *Persecution* (which is the common signification given to *fire*) could not produce that effect ; on the contrary, it generally confirms the errors of the persecuted.



uncertainty. As a well-grounded conviction of the truth of Christianity did not permit me, from this seeming deficiency in its plan, to conclude against the divine origin of the Gospel, I proceeded to examine what is left, after excluding all those theological questions on which the most learned as well as most pious persons are divided ; all questions, I mean, which cannot be settled without a judge of orthodoxy ; and I found this—belief or trust in Christ as the moral king and instructor of mankind. This is the only point (besides practical precepts) which admits of no doubt among those who receive the testimony of the New Testament : this is the only preaching of Christ's immediate disciples, which requires no unerring interpreter. I concluded, therefore, that this belief, this acceptance of Christ as a moral Lord and Master, is the only condition of being a CHRISTIAN. I was led besides, by numerous considerations, to the persuasion, that other views, more or less connected with this surrender of the individual *will* to the *will* of God, as we know it through the teaching and example of Christ—that conjectures about the nature of Christ himself, and respecting the manner of the Divine existence ; that notions relating to our future state, and theories innumerable on the world of spirits and our relations with it, would, at all times, but especially immediately after the publication of the Gospel, when the human mind was full of the most visionary systems of philosophy, attach themselves to the great and fundamental truth of Christianity. Considering, however, that the Gospel might co-exist with errors which did not directly oppose its influence on the will of man (else the Gospel could not have been preached till mankind had been completely enlightened by philosophy and science), I felt no doubt that it was the intention of Providence that *secondary* or *collateral* religious views should have free course among Christians, leaving such views to the operation of time, which would finally discover their proper value. Having gone through this mental process, it occurred to me, that, without at all intending it, or having previously thought of the above passage of St. Paul, I had said in other words exactly what the apostle had stated in expressions and meta-

phors not so familiar to our minds. I had, indeed, frequently dwelt upon that passage; but its meaning remained always enveloped in a mist, till, as it were, by the innate attraction of truth to truth, the result of my thoughts on orthodoxy and these remarkable words of Paul ran, like two kindred drops, into each other, forming, in my mind, a clear, full, and definite notion. This cannot be the effect of chance.

## LETTER II.

## ON HERESY AND ORTHODOXY.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

NOTHING weighs so heavily upon my mind, when engaged on theological subjects, as the constant fear of being misunderstood, and the habitual conviction, that no care on my part can possibly avert that danger. A most distinguished writer on the theory of morals (Sir James Mackintosh) complains, in a striking manner, of the almost insuperable difficulty which popular language presents to the philosopher who undertakes to throw light on the subject of man considered as a moral, responsible, and improvable agent\*. Yet that obstacle, in philosophy, appears reduced to the dimensions of a molehill, when compared with the mountain which the popular language of theology, and the prejudices inseparably connected with it, cast up in the way of any man who, in the examination of Christianity, ventures to leave the beaten path of scholasticism. The most important words of the New Testament have not only received an indelible false stamp from the hands of the old schoolmen, but, those words having, since the reformation, become common property in the language of the country, are, as it were, thickly incrustated with the most vague, incorrect, and vulgar notions. Thus the word *faith* (for instance), which, at the hands of the Romanist divines, had been nearly deprived of its original meaning, *trust*, which is directly and almost exclusively conveyed by πίστις, is still further perverted, by common usage among Protestants, to signify an enthusiastic ardour in asserting what

\* See *Discourse* prefixed to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. It would do great credit to the proprietors of that work to publish that admirable discourse in such a form as would make it generally accessible.

they can neither prove nor express to themselves in definite terms. The faith preached by the Roman Catholics, as the only way to salvation, is an act of mental obedience to the Catholic church, that infallible judge which they suppose to exist somewhere. The faith of many Protestants is an act of passionate asseveration grounded only upon the feelings of each individual, and rendered unalterable by the stubbornness with which they close their eyes, that they may not see any reason to waver.

How, under such circumstances, can misunderstanding be avoided? The investigation of truth, as in *theory* it is universally acknowledged, demands perfect composure of mind, and the absence of all disturbing passions. But is it possible for a writer who does not flatter popular notions in divinity to obtain many readers in that state of mind? Can a man who calls upon people, urging their duty to examine their religious notions, and to take the necessary trouble for separating truth from error, avoid giving offence? No. The strongest tendency of the human mind, in respect to religion, is to save itself trouble, either by embracing a superstitious and indiscriminate system of belief, or by dismissing the subject as totally unworthy of attention. Nearly hopeless, however, as this latter state of mind must appear to the theological writer, it is, in reality, preferable to that of the impassioned believer. The most frequent cause of unbelief, which I have observed in this country, is *disgust*, produced, on the one hand, by misrepresentations of Christianity, which defy reason and common sense; and, on the other, by a morbid enthusiasm, which may be, and frequently is, combined with the ambition and selfishness of minds of the lowest description. Now, if a theological writer succeeds in removing from himself the suspicion of his belonging to either of those classes, there are honest and upright men, who, in spite of their prejudices against Christianity, will listen to him with temper and candour. Not so the impassioned believer: in his case, the great difficulty is, to prevent him from taking his own hasty inferences for your statements. The direct opposite of the proposition which you wish to modify and explain, is instantly assumed as your meaning. If you endeavour, for instance, to ascertain with any de-

gree of precision the notion of INSPIRATION, you are, without appeal, reckoned among those who consider the sacred writers as men of the common stamp which belonged to their original station in life. If you venture to suggest the probability of some one interpolation in the Bible, you are no longer believed when you assert the general and substantial genuineness of the whole. I cannot but fear, therefore, that in consequence of what I have said respecting the simple condition demanded by the apostles for admission into the society of Christians, I shall be accused of having reduced the gospel to an empty name. But whatever may be the injustice of others towards me, I feel assured that you, at all events, will candidly hear me to the end ; allowing me, besides, to endeavour, by insisting upon the arguments already adduced, to set them in a clearer light, and thus prevent, as much as I am able, the misunderstandings which, more for the sake of Christian truth than for my own, I confess that I greatly dread. I shall, therefore, say a few words of explanation relative to that part of my former letter, where I spoke of the original terms of admission into the church. I shall, in the next place, add some other considerations which confirm my view. But I must previously remind you of the nature of the argument contained in that letter.

You must have frequently observed the hopelessness of the attempts which are constantly made to establish various points of Christian doctrine, by *logical* arguments founded on detached texts of scripture. You must have seen regular collections of passages, selected with the utmost patience, and arranged into classes with great ingenuity. Of this kind of theological works I do not remember any one more complete than that by which Dr. Samuel Clarke wished to prove his notions of the Trinity. But similar instances are not unfrequent : in fact, most works on controversial divinity are attempts of the same kind to draw some abstract proposition as the unquestionable result of the various expressions of scripture upon the given subject. You cannot but have observed, moreover, how short all such attempts fall of the intended object ; how very seldom any one is convinced by such works, unless, by a predisposition of the will, he

reads them, in order fully to become or to continue of the same opinion.

I do not mean (and here is an instance of the constant call for explanation) that the scriptures, especially those of the New Testament, are incapable of conveying a clear and definite sense upon any subject. My observations are confined to the metaphysical points upon which the most pious and most learned Christians are divided ; those points, in fact, which relate to the nature and modes of existence of the Deity, the supposed multiplicity of his personality, and the laws according to which he operates upon the human soul, and its principal faculties, intellect, and will. In order that I may protect myself against the cavils to which an imperfect enumeration of such subjects might expose me, I need only say, that I speak of the topics directly connected with these letters ; those, namely, upon which the Christian world is divided into *ORTHODOX* and *HETERODOX*. Upon such notions of God and his moral character, which are both *conceivable* by man, and morally useful to him ; upon our relations to our heavenly Father, and to his Son, the Saviour, his great messenger ; upon our mutual duties in this state of discipline, and our hopes in a future state of retribution : upon such matters nothing can exceed the clearness of the New Testament. The proof of that clearness is found in the agreement of Christians in all times and places. The ravings of enthusiasm, and the systematic profligacy of a certain kind of hypocrites, who now and then have ventured to question the sense of the scriptures on such subjects, do no more prove their obscurity, than the existence of a few human monsters prove an uncertainty in the first moral dictates of our conscience. Absolute certainty, certainty which the passions may not obscure, cannot exist where the will is concerned.

Now, my argument against the necessity of Orthodoxy, *i. e.* the necessity of taking the right side (as it is known to God) on any one of the points of doctrine which divide the Christian world, depends entirely upon the unquestionable fact, that whichever view we choose, there are arguments in favour of the other, strong enough to convince men most able to investigate

and most desirous to find the truth. I must not, however, be understood to assert that, in my opinion, the probability on both sides of all such questions is equal. Speaking for myself, I must declare that the evidence in favour of excluding such theories as that of the Trinity in Unity, on the ground that they form no part of the New Testament, is sufficient to produce moral certainty. But I grant, from my own experience at one period of my life, that, under certain habits of mind, produced by the usual catechetical and scholastic instruction, and assisted by that deep-seated and almost general persuasion, that all spiritual danger lies on the side of believing what is plain, and all the advantages on the side of asserting what is unintelligible and repugnant to reason—I grant that even the Athanasian Creed may appear as an essential part of the Christian doctrine. Having stated the case of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in a manner which gives every possible advantage to those who call themselves exclusively Orthodox, I only wish you to compare the fact laid before you with the intent and purpose of the Christian revelation: I require nothing more for my argument.

If saving faith and acceptance of one particular side of the questions agitated between the divines of various Christian denominations are identical things, the means of salvation must be as uncertain as the chance of choosing the right side of those questions. Here we are placed in the dilemma of creating for ourselves some such rule of Orthodoxy as that of the Roman Catholics—a process which removes doubt only one step, and ultimately increases it\*; or rejecting Christianity as an imperfect and partial system. What man, therefore, who is thoroughly convinced of the truth of the Gospel, will not instantly see the plain and only way out of this difficulty—*i. e.* the rejection of the gratuitous hypothesis of Orthodoxy. This *negative* argument, the proof which arises from the total *absence* of an authority sufficient to remove the uncertainty (such as I have explained it) in which the scriptures leave the disputed points, is of a nature to satisfy any unprejudiced mind, provided it is not in thralldom to superstitious fear. It is not like *positive*

\* Less hard 'tis not to err ourselves, than know

If our forefathers erred or no.

COWLEY.

proofs derived from various texts, where one expression modifies another, where one metaphor must be brought into agreement with another metaphor, and the reading of one manuscript must be staked against other readings. Here the whole question depends upon the *absence* of some rule, not exposed to *uncertainty*, by which the uncertainty in the sense of the Scriptures, experienced by multitudes of Christians, may be entirely removed. *Probability* is of no avail. If the proposed method of removing *uncertainty* may be reasonably questioned; if the *authority*, which claims the right of decision, cannot shew a divine appointment, clear, positive, distinct in every respect, it only increases the evil which it was intended to remedy; for it adds a fresh difficulty to those which, on the supposition of the necessity of Orthodoxy, stand, like an impenetrable phalanx, at the very entrance of the way of salvation. Hence, the inevitable conclusion, that to be right upon any of the points so long disputed among Christians cannot be a necessary condition of saving faith; else God would have demanded from us what he evidently has not given us the means to attain. And let it not be forgotten that the distinction between ESSENTIALS and NON-ESSENTIALS is perfectly arbitrary, and does not remove the difficulty: for by what certain rule can we divide the disputed doctrines into those two classes? I repeat it with the most heartfelt confidence: a just and merciful God, when making the greatest display of his love to mankind by allowing his beloved Son to die in confirmation of his divine mission, and for the purpose of endearing to us himself, and his proclamation of peace with God by repentance—God, the author and fountain of the blessings prepared for all mankind in his Gospel, must not be supposed to have made them dependent on doctrines so intricate, so incapable of being proposed in clear and uncontradictory language, so entirely unconnected with the sources of moral certainty. How could the Father of Mercies have bound up the benefits of Christianity within the complicated folds of Orthodoxy, and denied us a clue to solve those riddles? It is almost childish to answer, that we have the Scriptures for that purpose; for, owing to that very notion of Orthodoxy, the Scriptures themselves are, upon those points, the riddle.



Upon this immovable foundation I established the conclusion that the only indispensable condition of being in the *way of salvation*, through the Gospel, must be that which remains after the removal of all the doctrines which have been constantly disputed between the Orthodox and the Heterodox. And what can that be? Exactly that which we find proposed by the apostles: *repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ: i. e.* change the habitual direction of your *will* from sin to holiness, and TRUST the Lord Jesus Christ as your guide to spiritual safety; as your surety for the hope of eternal happiness.

If, retorting my own argument, it should be said that questions may also be raised upon the meaning of these words; I shall request the objector to mark this important difference between such *possible* cavils, and the prominent difficulties of Orthodoxy. This call of the Gospel is addressed to the WILL of every individual, under the direction of his CONSCIENCE. The conscience itself may indeed be perverted by the will, and the result may be (as we know to our sorrow) a rejection of God's merciful invitation. But this is of the very essence of all offers made to a moral agent *as such*: moral agency cannot exist without the power of doing what is morally wrong. RIGHT and WRONG, however, in such matters do not depend on any thing *external* to man, but on the object and direction of his WILL. Between this choice and that of *propositions*, which fall under the *intellectual judgment*, there is an immense difference. The means which alone can enable the judgment to be right in asserting or denying one thing or another, are not within us. We must search abroad in the universe, and, after the most anxious inquiry, may be unable to give a judgment which is not opposed by *reality*. When the judgment relates to the interpretation of words (which is invariably the case in all questions on the sense of scripture), the search is still more difficult. In matters of experience we frequently have the object of our examination at hand. But, in respect to the sense which the authors of the sacred books wished to convey, it is clear that the only *fact* on which our right judgment depends—the connexion of the writer's ideas with his expressions—is entirely out of our reach. All therefore that remains is conjecture. We are

obliged to take that for the sense of the writer which, when we have endeavoured, to the best of our power, to impress our minds with the character, purpose, and peculiar style of the person whose writings we have before us, appears to us most *likely* to have been his meaning. But in regard to moral good and evil, the rectitude of the conscience does not depend on any thing external to the *individual*—that domain over which it reigns by the appointment of the Supreme Intelligence, whose representative it is. To the *individual*, the voice of his conscience is the voice of God, and there is no appeal from its decision to a higher tribunal. The great duty of the WILL is to obey it; and the highest degree of perfection at which the WILL can arrive, is a state of settled independence from all other powers and influences. It is very true that the moral perceptions, the moral sense, or moral *taste* (as it might well be called) of the conscience is susceptible of many degrees of quickness and perfection: and, indeed, the moral government of God, as far as we know it, is only a method of training the conscience, and, by means of the conscience, the will of man. For this great purpose no trial or discipline is of a higher and more powerful nature than the offer of the Gospel. When men are called upon to repent, or change their will from the indulgence of the selfish passions to the habitual determination of embracing that which, on every occasion, the conscience shall approve as *BEST*, they cannot answer with any show of reason that they are not able to understand what is proposed to them. There is no hardship or injustice in proposing to men that they renounce a vicious life, because the abstract notions of vice and virtue are primitive, and, not only do not require, but do not admit of explanation. The man who *really* and *truly* wishes to be virtuous, is already in the possession of virtue—is *JUSTIFIED* from that moment. There is nothing like this in regard to abstract and *objective* truth: the most ardent wish to attain it, is no pledge of our possessing it. Thus it is that Christianity, unadulterated Christianity, is found in perfect harmony with the nature of our moral being. And observe how the announcement, which exclusively constitutes the Gospel, contains not only the simple and infallible method of being *justified*, or becoming virtuous, but also that of im-

proving that incipient moral state, and carrying it to the utmost degree of perfection of which human infirmity, assisted by divine favour, is capable under the peculiar circumstances of each individual. The natural question—how am I to proceed, and what am I to expect when I have given up the pursuit of selfish gratification—is answered by means of the doctrine and person of Christ, as both are known by the report of his life and character, which has already spread over a great part of the world, and which (were it unobstructed by the theories of Orthodoxy) would soon cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. In Christ we have a model of human virtue which every conscience, under the *indispensable preparation of repentance* (exactly in the order of things which the Gospel proposes), must approve, and which every WILL, subject to conscience, must embrace. How can this Gospel be said to lie under doubts and difficulties similar in the slightest degree to those of the Orthodox doctrines? With what colour of reason can this heavenly call upon mankind, be compared with the theological requisition to believe abstract statements concerning a person with two natures, and a nature with three personalities, which still remains *one* God? a guilt incurred by proxy, and a justification or state of virtue by a similar substitution? Offer the true Gospel, present the moral image of Christ, with his assurance of pardon, to the ignorant, or even to savages, in whom the seeds of morality are beginning to be developed, and you will find hearts eager to receive him: but go through the world with your Orthodox creeds in hand, and the intelligent among the uneducated classes will stare, and the educated will turn away with disdain. It is in vain to expect a diffusion of the Gospel, approaching in any degree to what the Scriptures would make us expect, so long as missionaries, imbued with the essential importance of the Orthodox doctrines, attempt the work of announcing Christ to the heathen. The only missionaries who seem to make a real progress are the Moravians, who, though still burdened with the Confession of Augsburg in their formularies, appear to have been taught by experience the necessity of laying it aside while they publish the message of salvation.

Strong, however, as my expressions may seem, I do not intend

to blame the numerous and highly respectable class of Christians, who, having had the prejudices of Orthodoxy not only transmitted to them by inheritance, but inculcated also by a laborious process of education, and bound up with every public and personal interest of their lives, stand up for that system with all the zeal which Christianity itself would rightly demand. I entreat them, however, to consider how perfectly inconsistent it is with the essential principle of Protestantism, to assume a superiority over others, in respect to the interpretation of Scripture. If any one is convinced that the Athanasian Trinity is proclaimed in the Bible, let him teach and expound it to the utmost of his power; but let him claim no dominion over the faith of others; and, much less, assume the power of excommunicating and denying the name of Christian to any one who receives Christ as his Lord and Master, and admits the Scriptures as the highest source of divine instruction vouchsafed to man. Let him remember that that instruction has not been addressed to some Christians, in order that they may expound, digest, and distribute it, in a modified state, to others. The Scripture is addressed to all, without distinction. To deny that it is divine, except when stamped and coined by a certain body of clergy, called a church, is nothing more or less than Popery.

Dark inuendoes are heard every day relative to a supposed responsibility of the understanding. Such assertions are, however, thrown out devoid of all proof, and, indeed, are totally incapable of any. As well might people declaim on the responsibility of the eyes, and the moral duty of seeing certain figures and colours in certain places, though the visual organ, straining itself to blindness, should see nothing but vacuity in that direction, or objects perfectly different from those which the moral optician was describing as perfectly visible\*. It cannot be too

\* Who that once has heard the anecdote of the HOLY HAIR, can avoid being reminded of it in connexion with this topic? Among the most valuable relics of an ancient monastery, was one of the identical hairs which the Roman soldiers had torn from the head of Christ. This hair was shewn to the public on a certain festival. The devout people looked through a glass into a golden box where the hair *should* be seen. But when the existence of such things is once fully established by faith, the keepers of

often repeated, that the only responsible part of man is his WILL. The will is, indeed, liable to blame for neglecting or misusing the external as well as the internal means of right perception; but it is perfectly unreasonable to make it answerable for the *perceptions* themselves. It would be *real*, not theological blasphemy (which generally means evil speaking of theological opinions), to say that God would doom any of his rational creatures to eternal misery because, though he had tried, he could not understand the plain demonstration of the truth, that the three angles of any triangle are equal to two right ones. Yet, to perceive that truth seems to be in the power even of the most moderate understanding. What then should we say of the assertion, that God dooms to everlasting perdition every one whose understanding rejects the Athanasian Creed? The understanding itself—that faculty which, according to fixed laws, receives and combines all impressions from without and within—is not a subject of moral duty. It is the WILL that has duties to perform, in regard to the whole collection of powers which constitute the individual. It is the duty of the WILL to use the UNDERSTANDING under an habitual love of divine truth, *i. e.* of the correspondence of our conceptions with the existences of God's material and spiritual universe. It is the moral duty of the WILL to use the understanding as a MIRROR\*, courting in every direction, and by every means in man's power, the rays of

the treasure take no further pains to facilitate the belief. To place a hair, or even a whole lock, in the box was not difficult. It happened, however, that for many years the box had contained no such thing. A rather too curious and prying Christian, having deposited his oblation of money on the salver that lay upon the table, behind which a priest in his stole was shewing the relic, kept his eye close to the glass for a considerable time. "I can see no hair, father (whispered he in the ear of the monk)."—"No wonder, my son (answered the priest in the same tone of voice), for I have shewn it these twenty years, and have never been able to see it." How many who shew the wonders of Orthodoxy might truly give a similar answer! Yet it is most probable, that if the monk and the devotee's dialogue had been overheard, both would have been sent to the Inquisition, to be punished for their visual weakness, and to learn to see better in future.

\* "For now we see as by means of a mirror, in hints." This translation seems to me to remove the obscurity which the established version leaves on this interesting passage.—1 Cor. xiii, 12.

divine truth ; and endeavouring, by industry, disinterestedness, and sincerity, to remove the soiling breath of the passions and desires, which so frequently distort those rays, and make them diverge from the mind.

But, above all, the great moral duty of the will, in relation to the understanding, is VERACITY. The impressions which every individual receives, the reflected truths which, after proper examination, are found to be permanent on the understanding, should be sacred to VERACITY. I need not add that this duty is peculiarly incumbent on the Christian, respecting the religious truths which he finds in the Scriptures. But excuse me if I repeat, that, in order to prepare ourselves for the performance of this duty, we should remove from the mind every superstitious fear, which, when existing there, must prevent those writings from conveying an unperverted sense. We hear loud and incessant declamations against the pride and presumption which are believed to interfere whenever any one rejects the interpretations of the Orthodox party. But what passion can be compared with the servile fear of many Christians, in the power of paralyzing the intellectual faculties, and preventing the exercise of a manly judgment? Can a trembling soul which sees the gulph of destruction gaping before it, during the examination of some contested point; can any one who, from the cradle, has been made to see every danger on the side of believing what is plain, rational, and consistent, and all imaginable safety in embracing what is most repugnant to common sense and the first laws of the understanding; can a mind in this state of weakness and trepidation avoid the temptation to close its eyes against the truth, and “speak wickedly for God and talk deceitfully for Him?” It would be, indeed, not only useless, but in many cases cruel, to urge any powerful considerations which might disturb the helpless slaves, or rather victims, of an education essentially intolerant; but every man who has courage to think, and loves truth more than he fears obloquy and insult, is bound to caution all those who, possessing a mental character of the same stamp may not yet be aware of its value, against the dangers which threaten it while it has not been fully developed. It is to such persons that I address my warnings.

let them beware of superstitious fear in the investigation of religious truth ; let them encourage in their souls an habitual attention to the duty of VERACITY, and read the Scriptures with a firm determination of not deceiving themselves, for the sake of a false internal peace with early prejudices ; and, still more, of not concealing from others whatever impressions may have assumed a clear and prominent character during the examination of the sacred writings. Since *subjective religious truth*, *i. e.* the impressions which the Scriptures leave on each individual, have not been made by God a matter of OBEDIENCE to any authorized judge of truth ; since the meaning of the Scriptures has been left unlimited by the judgment of any external authority ; it must be supposed that it is the intention of Providence that the Scriptures be studied, *in common*, by all those who acknowledge their authority : and, if such be the purpose of the Divine mind, it must be a duty of all Christians not to deceive each other as to the results of their respective perceptions of the sense of the Scriptures. To act otherwise, must be a sin of FALSEHOOD : it must be “ holding the truth in unrighteousness,” (or translating more literally) “ in *injustice* :” for what injustice can exceed that which is done to mankind, when any one casts into the common treasury of intellectual experience, as his own TRUTH, as the real impression on his mind, that which is entirely unlike that impression ? Such a deliberate LIE, in relation to the Scriptures, must be hateful in the eyes of God. He knows our weakness of judgment, and our consequent liability to error ; but what can plead our excuse before Him, when we wilfully corrupt and deface the only unquestionable TRUTH we possess—the *reality of our consciousness* ? It cannot be our duty to be right in our interpretation of the sacred records, because God has not given us the means to understand them with moral certainty, beyond their general and practical objects ; but we are bound to be VERACIOUS, to state candidly what we see, because, in regard to this, we are fully conscious whether we speak the TRUTH or a LIE.

From faithfulness to the duty of VERACITY, the Christian world might finally derive the inestimable advantage of knowing what is the most general, most distinct, and most lasting

impression of the Scriptures on the *collective* intellect of those to whom they are *collectively* addressed. That impression, if gathered from the free and unbiassed examination of the most intelligent portion of the Christian world, might properly be called the *natural* sense of the Scriptures, the sense which Providence intends to prevail. In what department of knowledge do we see, or could a civilized nation endure, the method which is followed in regard to religion? I have, indeed, heard and read of some attempts to perpetuate, by means of oaths, some particular theory of medicine, which at some time or other was considered to have arrived at a perfection above all possibility of improvement. I am aware that the pupils of the school of Hippocrates vowed to the Gods never to perform or recommend the operation of lithotomy; and I recollect to have seen, many years ago, in a book written against the use of the Jesuits' Bark, a sentence of excommunication which a high ecclesiastical authority (I have an idea that it was the Pope) had fulminated against any practitioner of medicine that prescribed it. Similar attempts to stop the progress of knowledge, just at the point where the stoppage suited the vanity, the indolence, and interest of some powerful body of men, have been frequent; but they have been gradually swept off by the progress of civilization. Yet the same method of keeping down all Christians to the measure of a certain standard, continues to this day in the fullest vigour. The physician who, in order to please some great and powerful association of medical men, should be found reporting cases, contrary to the *impression* of his mind, would justly be ranked with the lowest and most odious individuals of our species. He who, upon receiving his medical diploma,, should solemnly engage never to depart from a curative system, upon which the professors of the faculty had been fiercely contending for many ages, would be said to betray the interests of humanity. Why?—Because it is well known that the only security we possess against the perpetuation of error; the only means for its final separation from truth, with which it always mixes itself more or less, is free discussion between unbiassed minds. But it has been decided otherwise in regard to religion. The BIBLE, that book in which all Christians “think they possess



the means of eternal life," but about which, experience has also forced Protestants, at least, to agree, that, like the simples employed in healing the body, it is exposed to great mismanagement:—the Bible, concerning which such furious contentions have taken place—the Bible alone, among all the objects of highest importance to man, must be applied according to *privileged systems*. Though the difficulty of establishing the sense of the Bible on subjects about which Christians have destroyed Christians without mercy, is attested by the blood of the victims, and the chances of error in the decisions which constitute the established orthodoxies may be calculated by the frenzy of the passions which attended those decisions; nevertheless, those systems must be perpetuated by the engagement of passions still more dangerous to truth and veracity than the pride and resentment which carried heretics to the stake. That the Roman Catholics, who have persuaded themselves that by a perpetual miracle, no error was, at any time, permitted to form part of their church's creed, should fence that creed with every thing that can secure to it the awe and the attachment of both the clergy and the laity, is perfectly natural and intelligible. But that Protestants should continue to imitate the same conduct and practice, in respect to creeds, to interpretations of Scripture, in which all acknowledge that there may be errors, is one of the strangest inconsistencies which the history of civilized nations attests. In the mean time, and by the direct influence of this system, divisions which time and reflection might heal, are rendered perpetual and incurable. Under these artificial securities, under these regular combinations of men, thus solemnly bound not to depart from a certain view of Scripture, no gradual approach to a brotherly conformity can be made. The general sense of Christians cannot be progressively ascertained by the transition of one body of men into another. If any one ventures to examine the points in question, he is obliged to weigh his doubts in secret, as if he were meditating a crime. To doubt any of the principal doctrines which are used as the colours of these compactly organized and disciplined bodies, is to meditate desertion; to deny their truth, is not a change of opinion—as in other disputed matters—it is joining

the ranks of the most detested rebels. Under such circumstances, can there be a possibility of finally rendering the Scriptures what they should be,—the bond of union, both of intellect and heart, among those who bear the name of Christians?

Alas! were it not for the baneful power of ORTHODOXY—of that pretended duty of agreeing with the doctrines which, at some earlier or later period, became the nucleus, the bond of a church-party, we might long since have learnt, by the united and freely compared experience of the Christian world, either what is the most natural sense of Scripture on the disputed doctrines, or (what is more probable) a general conviction might have been established, that the field of metaphysical speculation has been left free, in order that individuals may indulge their peculiar intellectual tendencies, provided they do not interfere with the opposite tendencies of others. But what we now possess is not the intellectual experience of the millions of Christians who, in the course of many centuries, have joined the various standards of belief: their assent has never been free and unbiassed—at least, we have strong reasons to suspect its freedom. The Christian world has been divided into proselyting parties, who, assisted by secular power, and frequently using or threatening violence, have recruited their ranks, and prevented desertion by means totally unconnected with free and deliberate conviction. If, perchance, a certain number of individuals have really and fully coincided with the standard of faith adopted by their church, the early prepossessions in which they have been brought up, the spiritual terrors of heresy which have been deeply impressed on their minds (not to mention attractions and trammels of another kind), take away more than half the value of their testimony. We have, indeed, no reason to doubt the sincerity of individuals from general surmises. But though we highly respect the attainments, and venerate the virtues of many who have been and are still solemnly bound to support the peculiar interpretations and doctrines of some particular church which definitely limits the sense of Scripture by articles, instead of qualifying the sense of those articles by the sense which the subscriber finds, or may find in Scripture; we cannot consider the impression which the Scripture has left on their minds as an

experimental instance of the natural sense or mental result of those books. The experiment, like many of those attested in the history of alchemy, has been made in a vessel not at all free from substances which ought not to have been there.

The free and unprejudiced mind dwells with delight on the image of the universal church or convocation of Christ, as it would naturally have grown "into the fulness of the body" of its glorious founder, had not its growth been disturbed and distorted by the intolerant pride of ORTHODOXY. United by the acknowledgment of Jesus of Nazareth, as our King, appointed by his Father to reign over his moral kingdom, till every tribe and nation shall confess that he is Lord, "to the glory of the Father;" agreed in the confession that for every purpose of well-grounded hope connected with the future, and of all spiritual instruction required for the present life, he is "one with the Father;" professing to take his will and example as the rule and the pattern of their individual conduct; and confident in the promise he gave them of an internal divine assistance to enlighten each upright conscience, and strengthen each honest heart in the progressive attainment of moral conformity with his Master, so that he may be one with him, as Jesus and his Father are one\*; adopting charity, *i. e.* mutual love and kindness, as the distinguishing sign and common bond of the Christian society; keeping Christ's declaration, that "his kingdom is not of this world," as a strong barrier against the mixture of temporal interests with the spiritual concerns of the Christian community;—under such circumstances, Christianity might have spread (as indeed it was intended to do, and as we have reason to hope that it will, in spite of obstacles) as a bond of fraternal love between the nations of the earth; as a preservative against the fears of superstition, which still embitter the soul of man in every region under heaven, and poison his best natural tendencies; as the support of one common hope of happiness in a future world; banishing from among the rational inhabitants of the earth the notion that ceremonies, sacrifices, and priestly interference, are necessary to please that great and good God, of whom the highest and truest thing that can be said, in human language, is, that he is a

\* John xvii, 11, 21, 22.

SPIRIT, and that he delights in those who worship him in *spirit* and in *truth*; cherishing the growth and full development of the faculties which distinguish us from the brutes;—in a word, spreading and perfecting CIVILIZATION to the utmost limits of the inhabitable earth.

And what (let me earnestly and solemnly ask) has hitherto turned this view into a mocking dream—a dream which deludes by images which are the very reverse of the sad realities which surround us?—ORTHODOXY; the notion that the eternal happiness or misery of individuals is intimately connected with the acceptance or rejection of a most obscure system of metaphysics; a system, perplexing in the extreme to those who are best acquainted with its formerly technical, now obsolete language, and perfectly unintelligible to the rest of the Christian world; a system which, to say the least, *seems* to contradict the simplest and most primitive notions of the human mind concerning the unity, the justice, and the goodness of the Supreme Being; a system which, if it be contained in the Scripture, has been laid under so thick and impenetrable a veil, that thousands who have sought to discover it, with the most eager desire of finding it, whose happiness in this world would have been greatly increased by that discovery, and who, at all events, would have escaped much misery had they been able to attest it, even on grounds of probability sufficient to acquit themselves before their own conscience, have been compelled by truth to confess their want of success. Yet Orthodoxy declares this very system identical with Christianity—with that gospel which was “preached to the poor” and “revealed unto babes:” such a system, we are told, is that Faith which “*except every one keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.*”

By the influence of this Orthodoxy the world has been placed in a worse condition, for peace and mutual love, than it was before the Gospel. Neighbouring tribes might, in ancient times, make their Gods the pretext for indulging mutual jealousy. But the comprehensive religion of the Romans, though inexorable when a foreign system threatened to loosen the bonds of their political body (which, as experience proved, was the decided tendency of Christianity organized by Bishops into a political

body, foreign to that under whose laws they lived) constantly bestowed protection on the religions of the conquered countries, and prevented, by this means, all attacks on each other. But observe the effects of Christianity identified with Orthodoxy. The earth reeks still from the torrents of blood which have been shed in the name of the Gospel. And the error is plausible. It is true that the SPIRIT of the Gospel itself opposes it; but it is of the very nature of Orthodoxy to direct the attention, not to the SPIRIT but to the letter; and the LETTER of the New Testament contains no express declaration against preventing heterodoxy by the infliction of punishment. That Jesus did not allow the two disciples to command fire from heaven against the Samaritans who would not receive him, is an example that might protect the unconverted heathen from Christian zealots; that he would not pray for twelve legions of angels to save him out of the hands of his enemies, only proves that "the cup he had to drink could not pass away from him." Yet, if the bond of his kingdom is Orthodoxy; if the eternal life of the subjects of that kingdom depends on the purity of their creed, and heresy murders their souls, there is nothing in the New Testament that opposes the use of effectual measures to counteract evils of that magnitude. The argument, that, if death is the fit punishment for the murderer of the body, much more must it be deserved by him who murders the soul, has the force of demonstration for every orthodox people on the face of the earth. So it has acted among the orthodox of the most opposite parties; and so it would act at this moment, even among Protestants, if a stanch orthodox clergy were supported by a stanch orthodox people. The horrors of the Inquisition do not belong to Rome by any necessary connexion between their Catholic tenets and their cruelty. If Roman Catholics have been prominent in the vast field of religious persecution, it is because they are in the same degree prominent in the belief of their exclusive Orthodoxy.

Nor could it be otherwise; for that mistaken Christianity which proclaims abstract creeds as the only sure pledges of eternal happiness in heaven, has, above all other agencies upon the mind, the power of combining sincerity and tranquillity of conscience with the two most powerful passions—fear and angry pride. An

ancient idolater, who saw the object of his worship despised, would feel the insult as personal ; but the mere act of neglecting his favourite altar for another, would not give him the slightest offence. He believed that certain practices and oblations were preferable to others in regard to his individual happiness, just as in Roman Catholic countries, different persons choose the patronage of different saints, without a shadow of uneasiness arising from the various views and tastes of the devotees. But the orthodox, of whatever denomination or creed he may be, cannot endure varieties of creed : and, indeed, it is not in the nature of things that he should. Every man's salvation, according to his view of the subject, depends upon unhesitating assent to certain propositions, of such a very abstract nature, so inconsistent with the most certain principles of the human understanding, that even when they have been most assiduously forced upon the infant mind, they very frequently drop off, in spite of the most sincere efforts of the same mind in its maturity. *Fear* and *sympathy* are generally the guardians to whom the orthodox creed is entrusted. Its preservation depends, therefore, much more upon external impressions than upon conviction. Now, a man who should believe that his salvation was connected with his assent to a series of geometrical theorems which he had once demonstrated, would not be irritated by the disbelief of his neighbours. But the disbelief of others has an irresistible effect on the mind, when the intellect is uneasy. The WILL, in the cases to which I allude, is invariably found to have encroached on the province of the UNDERSTANDING, and forced it to be silent. This powerful faculty, however, has submitted reluctantly ; and will struggle for mastery at the approach of another intellect which enjoys its freedom, or, at least, does not drag chains so oppressive and galling. But since, according to the orthodox, every doubt thus raised by sympathy, endangers his own salvation, how can his fears allow him to be tolerant ? How shall he be able to endure the presence of the tempter ? He must regard him with feelings similar to those which a direct emissary of Satan would raise.

I must, however, hasten to conclude this letter, leaving you to enlarge and unfold the hints already given, as well as those with which I shall close it.

You have only to cast a wide and comprehensive glance over the New Testament, to be convinced that the spiritual (*i. e.* mental) stamp of the gospel is LIBERTY. Christ is not only a SAVIOUR from SIN, but from SUPERSTITION—a word that properly embraces all religions which make ceremonies and a priesthood essential to spiritual safety. I do not exclude the Jewish religion; though I fully exempt it from blame. It was, indeed, established and sanctioned by God, for a people who, for the “hardness of their heart” required a moral system of education, strongly mixed with the very faults to which they were nationally inclined—a most delicate process for the final attainment of good, which man has not knowledge enough to conduct, and which the infinite wisdom of God alone can conduct without the danger of fortifying and increasing the evil, which, by a partial and temporary sanction, is to be finally extirpated. Christ came to deliver the world from that evil; “to deliver us from the yoke of the law,” and from every yoke of a similar nature. But observe the earliest attempt to corrupt, and, indeed, according to St. Paul, to nullify the gospel\*. Hear the voice of the first inventors of DAMNATORY ORTHODOXY†. “And certain men

\* “Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.” *Gal. v, 2*.—The Gospel, the glad tidings of deliverance, would, of course, be contradicted by the resumption of ceremonies as necessary to salvation.

† The declaration in Mark xvi, 16 (if the passage from v. 9 to the end be genuine, which there is good reason to doubt) has been supposed to contain the principle of damnatory Orthodoxy; but, certainly, without foundation. The safety or salvation which the Gospel promises is, as I have shewn before, attached to REPENTANCE (expressed by baptism or immersion, which signifies a moral *death* to past sinful courses, and a resurrection, or new *life*, to virtue) and the acceptance of Christ as our moral guide. Condemnation, *i. e.* CENSURE (with the extent of its effects I am not, at present, concerned) is declared to be incurred by those who, having had a sufficient attestation of the truth of the Gospel, nevertheless reject it, and remain unrepentant. This is very different from the metaphysical Orthodoxy which dooms to eternal punishment such as will maintain their mental liberty against it. *Matt. x, 14, 15*, condemns the bigoted and disingenuous spirit which refuses so much as to *entertain*, to give a *hearing* to persons who by fair and reasonable means wish to call our attention to views of religious subjects differing from our own. It is, in fact, a pointed declaration against the intolerant *Jewish Orthodoxy*. Let it be observed, besides, that the

who came down from Judea, taught the brethren (and said) Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, YE CANNOT BE SAVED\*." These men understood the method of keeping up the religious dependence of the laity on the priesthood. FEAR is the very essence of superstition†, and superstition the chain by which the priest secures the people to himself. Hence, in all ages, the constant re-echoing of the words, *ye cannot be saved*: except ye be under the Pope, *ye cannot be saved*: except ye believe the Athanasian creed, *ye cannot be saved*: except ye believe that the first sin of the first man utterly corrupted human nature, *ye cannot be saved*: except ye believe in predestination and imputed righteousness, *ye cannot be saved*.

How different was the language of the apostle Paul! How perfectly independent of such conditions was the salvation which he preached as "glad tidings." "Stand fast . . . in the LIBERTY wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage‡." To demand either ceremonies, with the Jews; or mortifications, with the Ascetics; or belief in metaphysical theories, with the Theosophists§ (three classes of men who "came in privily to spy out the christians' liberty||," and to induce them to add to the gospel the views of their respective parties); to make salvation depend on any thing external or internal, except that faith, that trust in the truths announced and sanctioned by Christ, which shews itself in holiness of life, was, in Paul's eyes, to destroy the Gospel. Even the apostle James, who, though enlightened by the same spirit as Paul, could not entirely divest himself of the peculiar tendencies of his individual character, which bore the stamp of Judaism much more than that of the great apostle of the Gentiles, even James was full of the leading notion that Christianity is "the law of liberty." But let us hear Paul again. "Where the apostles had no complicated metaphysical creed to propose. Their message was, "The kingdom of heaven," *i. e.* the moral reign of God, through the Messiah, "is at hand."

\* Acts xv.

† *Δεισιδαιμονία*; or, as literally as it can be rendered, fear of the invisible powers.

‡ Gal. v, 1.

§ See Coloss. ii.

|| Gal. ii, 4, compared with Coloss. ii.



spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty\*. Orthodoxy has so blinded Christians, that many, I fear, will be ready to consider the application of this passage as a mere accommodation of the word *liberty*, to my subject. I have, indeed, frequently remarked how seldom divines dwell upon this part of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians; how constantly they pass over that most significant sentence—"Who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; NOT OF THE LETTER, BUT OF THE SPIRIT; FOR THE LETTER KILLETH, BUT THE SPIRIT GIVETH LIFE." But is it not clear that, according to Paul, the New Testament or covenant, through Christ, has no LETTER? That it does not consist in words to be explained, in order to reach some abstruse sense as the substance of that covenant? The VAIL which remained "untaken away" in the reading of the Old Testament "by the Jews," the "*vail* which is done away in Christ," the "*vail*" of the "*letter that killeth*," the cloud of WORDS which was afterwards made indispensable for salvation, remains, alas! upon the hearts of most Christians to this hour. It is, I am convinced, this *verbal faith*, this "*letter that killeth*," which ruins Christianity amongst us; which inspires most denominations of Christians with aversion, suspicion, and jealousy towards those who do not receive the *letter* of their creeds and articles; which makes the attempt to spread the gospel among the heathens an object of mockery in the eyes of unbelievers, who cannot but ridicule the idea of preaching abroad what is yet unsettled at home. Would heaven that Christians had their own "*vail*" of orthodox words, that *letter* which killeth by spreading and supporting unbelief, taken away from their minds; that limiting Orthodoxy to the acceptance of Christ as the SPIRIT† ("*the Lord is that Spirit*" says St. Paul) *i. e.* the meaning, the end of all revelation, would not allow a new *letter*, consisting of abstract doctrines, to involve their

\* 2d Cor. iii, 17.

† That πνευμα, in opposition to γραμμα, can mean *spirit* only in the sense which contrasts with *letter*, seems too clear to require proof. Yet, if I am not much mistaken, πνευμα is, by some, understood in this passage, in a mystical sense, as if conveying the notion that Christ is the *spirit*, the internal power which animates, strengthens, and enlightens the true believers; a sense, in my opinion, totally inconsistent with the con-

minds in a "vail" which obstructs the view of the Gospel, even more than the old letter, which kept the Jews in bondage. Happy indeed would it be for the best interests of mankind, if all who glory in the name of Christians would turn away from the clouds of words that divide them into hostile parties; making the holy Jesus, the Son of God, their point of union, and giving the right hand of fellowship to every one who, by obedience to the will of God, as we know it through our Lord and Master, shews that he *loves him in sincerity*. Then would the church of Christ be UNIVERSAL indeed: then would the spirit of the Lord be truly among us, and with it would appear spiritual LIBERTY attended by peace and charity: then might we hope to gain over many of those who, shocked by our present wranglings, turn away from the Saviour, whom we misrepresent as the founder of an unintelligible religion.

I conclude with an observation upon which, ever since it occurred to me, my mind has dwelt with unabated interest. I wish you to observe the connexion of the notions SPIRIT and LIBERTY which appears in many parts of the New Testament, and especially in the passage on which I have made these remarks. But most particularly do I wish to draw your attention to that sentence (to me the most sublime that ever was expressed in human language) which our Saviour addressed to the Samaritan woman. When that right-minded, though frail creature, shewed her eager desire for religious instruction, especially on the long-pending controversy between her own nation and the Jews, what was Christ's answer to her? Does he describe any new modification of the usual systems of religion? Does he speak of a new priesthood, of a new doctrine, of a new sacrifice?—Far from it. "The hour cometh (he says

text. According to Paul, in this place, Christ is the *end το τέλος*, the final object of "that which is abolished," namely, the *letter* of the law: consequently he is the *thing meant*, the *spirit* of that *letter*. Upon this is grounded Paul's assertion, that whoever should turn towards Christ, *i. e.* the *spirit* or meaning of the *letter* of the Mosaic law, would have the "vail" which blinded the Jews taken away from his mind. Wherever that *meaning*, that *spirit of the Lord*, that true knowledge of the end of revelation, which centres in the person of Christ, prevails, taking possession of the heart and mind, *there is liberty*.

in regard to his approaching kingdom) and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in *spirit* and in *truth*." TRUTH, in this passage, evidently means *reality*, in contradistinction to *emblems*; the worship of the heart, in opposition to the worship of ceremonies; the direct worship of the soul, not that which requires the interposition of a priesthood. But mark the *reason* given by Christ—GOD IS A SPIRIT. To the Eternal Mind (such is the reasoning implied), to that Eternal Being who is the Father of Spirits, the only acceptable worship must be that which is truly *spiritual*. Figures and ceremonies must cease; for they are shadows, and he loves realities. The only sacrifice he demands is that of the individual will to his supreme will. This is the *reasonable service* of faith, peculiar to Christianity. But the mind, which is both the altar and the priest of this sublime and pure sacrifice, should not be degraded by a subjection to *words*, which are mere figures, more oppressive and enslaving than that of the Jews to the ceremonial law. The spirit of Christ has set the spirit of the true worshipper completely free from such fetters. The Christian worshipper should worship in TRUTH; and nothing is true to the human mind but what carries conviction to the understanding: another man's truth is error to *him* who does not see it as true. To offer up such borrowed truth—a truth which the individual reason rejects—is to lay a falsehood before God's throne as an offering. Such, in most cases, are the offerings of Orthodoxy.

## LETTER III.

## ON HERESY AND ORTHODOXY.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IN my first letter I defined Heresy “an opposition to the various standards of Christian faith which men not only adopt for themselves, but also think binding on all others.” This was the result of the reasoning which preceded the definition; and I consider it proved by that reasoning. I have, nevertheless, employed a great part of that first letter, and the whole of the second, in confirming the accuracy of that analytical conclusion. But I am not yet satisfied that I have done enough. The difficulty of uprooting a prejudice which was almost undisturbed during, at least, fourteen centuries before the Reformation; a prejudice which the reformers themselves, for the most part, confirmed; a prejudice which is instilled into the opening mind with the first rudiments of education; a prejudice, in fine, which in this country has become so disguised that it exists in full vigour side by side with the most active spirit of political freedom: the difficulty of uprooting such a prejudice is greater than any one can conceive who has not traced the minute ramifications by means of which it keeps its hold on men possessing the best qualities of mind and heart.

Do not lose sight, I again request you, of the leading principle which, from the beginning I have laid before you. Heresy, in the sense which the different parties who call themselves Orthodox have given to that word, cannot be conceived unless it be proved that Christ established some perpetual authority—an authority to be kept in existence by an unquestionably legitimate succession,—whose duty and privilege it is to declare, what doctrines are true. If no such authority exists, if the Scriptures

are addressed to the understanding, not of a privileged class, but of every individual who wishes to follow Christ; if there is no divinely appointed judge to decide between the various mental impressions, *i. e.* the various meanings which the Scriptures convey to different minds; Heresy is a word which expresses only the anger of one Christian against another. It is only in this light that a history of the Inquisition can be read without nourishing in ourselves an inquisitorial spirit. Excuse this repetition: the truth, in circumstances like those of my subject, glides off the mind as a paradox, unless it be repeatedly brought in contact with it to be gradually, as it were, absorbed, and incorporated with the rest of our knowledge.

The same process should be adopted in regard to important passages of Scripture, which, for many years, have been constantly presented to the mind in connexion with *established doctrines*. Language being a collection of arbitrary signs and words, having no meaning but that which is given to them by the mental habits of those who use them, any word, and, still more, any sentence (for words in combination are particularly subject to a variety of shades of meaning), if habitually repeated in connexion with certain notions, will appear to reject all other significations, as it were, by a *natural* power. The identical texts which opposite parties of Christians so decidedly assert to convey *naturally* and *obviously* notions which destroy each other, are (considering the sincerity with which those assertions are generally made) striking instances of the unlimited power of association over language. The controversialists stare, in unfeigned surprise, at what each conceives to be the glaring absurdity and perverseness of his opponent. The ill-subdued flames of equally genuine zeal make the blood boil in their veins when they observe that such *plain* words as body and blood, for instance, are not taken in their *obvious* sense; forgetting that in arbitrary signs, especially when they may be used *figuratively*, that sense alone can be obvious which use has rendered familiar\*. For persons who

\* At all events, that sense cannot be *obvious* which would not *stand before* or present itself readily, and in the first instance. If we heard a person, holding some bread in his hands, say, *This is my body*, the *literal* sense

belong to the same age and country, and who, by education and habits, have been placed in a sort of mental contact with the generations of their not very remote forefathers, the language of those ancestors may, in many cases, properly be said to have an *obvious* meaning. But in the very ancient languages, especially of the Eastern nations, there is hardly any expression which can have an obvious meaning for *us*. The habits of the Jews, in our Saviour's time, for instance, were so totally different from ours; the mass of each individual's ideas was so dissimilar to that which will be found in a corresponding class of people among us, that the phrases which would convey a clear meaning to a child in those times, may now be grossly misunderstood by the ablest men. We have but one method of avoiding great mistakes in the perusal of such writings as those of the New Testament. The reader should make himself, as much as possible, a cotemporary of the writers, by an intimate acquaintance with their language, their learning, their modes of thinking, and their habits. In this manner will he be able to understand the general import of those documents, especially in connexion with *practical* subjects of morals;—*morals* I say, not limiting the word to *external* conduct, but extending it to the discipline of the *will* and affections. In regard to this, the notions of mankind are so coincident, that they may be conveyed even by the slightest hints\*. But in respect to philosophical or speculative ideas, especially in relation to the invisible world, far from expecting that the sense of those writers should be *obvious*, a sober and unprejudiced mind will be prepared to meet with great obscurity. All that we have a right to expect is a *probable* sense, disclosed by the light which the clearer passages cast over the more obscure. But even this probability is greatly diminished,

would by no means come foremost into our minds: it would not *stand before us*, or be obvious. This observation may be applied in very different ways, according to circumstances.

\* It is owing to this that Homer's poems are easily understood, so far, at least, as to create a deep interest. The words of that patriarch of poetry have a living interpreter in every human heart. The same happens in regard to many portions of the Hebrew Scriptures.

by the habits of mind which are sedulously cherished in children, and which grow with them into manhood. The notions which some early writers conceived and published when knowledge was very scarce among Christians—the notions which, in subsequent times, a clergy who took for their mental guide a deceitful *verbal* philosophy, reduced into a logical system, with nothing but empty speculation for its ground—these notions digested into catechisms, whose expressions have been incorporated with every vernacular tongue, are now so attached, by mental association, to certain passages of Scripture, that it is very difficult to separate them, even when the understanding is thoroughly convinced that they could not be thus associated in the minds of the original teachers of Christianity\*.

That you may completely overcome such habits, allow me to recommend the re-perusal of such passages in the New Testament as speak of the SPIRIT in opposition to the LETTER, and of Christian LIBERTY in contrast with Jewish BONDAGE; examining them in the light of the principle which I have developed in the two preceding Letters. Examine, I beg you, whether, if the common notions of HERESY and ORTHODOXY were true, the law of Moses would be so decidedly inferior to the Gospel as the apostle Paul represents it; or whether, on the contrary, if, while our salvation depended on our right choice of *theological* opinions, and on the legitimate use of SACRAMENTS (as some practices are called without the least ground or authority), we had been left in great uncertainty as to the truth of the opinions and the divine appointment of the ministers of the sacraments, we should

\* I wish again and again, if possible, to remove the alarm which the clear statement of the difficulty in which we are placed, respecting doctrines considered by a great majority of Christians as of supreme importance, will raise. But as that unquestionable difficulty is the *leading fact* which Providence has permanently left us, in order that we may perceive how unjustifiably those *difficult points* have been superadded to a Gospel intended for the learned as well as the unlearned, for the lowly civilized, as well as the most refined nations—as it is that very *fact* which demonstrates the necessity either of rejecting Christianity as not of divine origin, or accepting it *free from those metaphysical appendages*; I am bound, in proportion as I value from my heart the Gospel of Christ, to urge, “in season and out of season,” the important consideration which forms the basis of these Letters.

not be in an infinitely lower condition than the Jews. Under the supposed necessity of embracing certain dogmas, and receiving certain sacraments (the latter, of course, at the hands of *legitimate* ministers), as conditions of salvation, our Christian LIBERTY ought rather to be called the Christian anarchy. It would be such liberty as that which sailors would enjoy upon a coast abounding in sunken rocks, when every lighthouse, and buoy, and signal, had been removed; or rather, when every family who lived in the neighbourhood had been allowed to set up lights, and to float buoys, according to their respective notions of the safe and the dangerous parts of those seas; and to distribute contradictory charts of soundings, which each family had tried with lines of some three feet in length.

The New Testament is, indeed, deprived of its very life on the usual supposition that Orthodoxy is identical with or constitutes an essential part of *saving faith*. That passage, in particular, which I paraphrased at the end of my second Letter, becomes a collection of empty sounds, if we admit that supposition. There is, indeed, but one sense in which it expresses a definite notion, in conformity with the meaning of the word Gospel (*i. e.* glad tidings), and presents a real contrast between the new and the old dispensation. Permit me to call again your attention to the 3d chapter of the 2d Epistle to the Corinthians, taking it up at the beginning till we come to that passage which I explained in my second Letter. But I wish to make one observation as an introduction to the exposition of the passage.

Had one of the principal offices of the apostles been that of establishing such a VERBAL rule of faith as would have been indispensable for the existence of an association of men who were to depend on Orthodoxy for union in this world, and for salvation in the next, the delivery of that RULE would certainly have been their most solemn and public act. If, to settle the question concerning the deference which gentile proselytes owed to the law of Moses (so long as the Mosaic polity existed), the apostles issued a formal decree, preceded by a mature and public deliberation, how can it be imagined that they would have omitted to publish some such creed as that which was afterwards attributed to them, if they had been persuaded, *by inspiration*, that an ac-



ceptance of such articles was necessary to the attainment of eternal happiness? Both the appearance of the pretended creed of the apostles, about the time when the notion of articular Orthodoxy, as identical with saving faith began to be general, and the non-existence of a real apostles' creed, before that period, combine to prove irrefragably the un-apostolic character of that notion.

But in the passage to which I again call your attention, we have a more direct and positive proof that Paul's views were quite opposite to the notion in question. His apostolic authority having been disputed at Corinth, and again recognized in consequence of the effect produced by the first of his Epistles addressed to that Christian community, and of the exertions of his faithful friend Titus ; this second Letter contains, as it might be expected, numerous observations on the legitimacy of his apostleship. Most, however, of these observations are rather attributable to bursts of feeling, which the writer is desirous to check, than to a deliberate intention of recommending himself to the Corinthians. At that point of the Letter which, according to our arbitrary divisions of the text, we call the beginning of the third chapter, the writer suspects that he is addressing his reconciled Corinthian converts in the tone of self-commendation. He accordingly checks himself, though not without hinting at the mean arts of his rivals, who used, it seems, to procure commendatory letters to the various Christian assemblages, among whose members they were anxious to gain popularity. Paul, remembering this unworthy method of canvassing for the favour of those whom, with so much labour, he had "begotten to Christ," expresses a well grounded confidence that he himself was above the necessity of procuring recommendations to his own spiritual children. "Others (I express his meaning) may want letters introducing them to your favour ; but in yourselves I have a LETTER which much exceeds all other such writings in value. The world may read in you one of my clearest titles to the apostleship of which some interested and envious men would deprive me. You, Corinthians, appear before the world as an epistle of Christ, in my favour. You are a *letter*, written, not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God ; not in tables of stone, like those

which attested the mission of Moses, but in the fleshly tables of the heart, whereupon we, the apostles of Christ, are commissioned to engrave the law of the Spirit."

As soon, however, as the idea of a contrast between the old and the new dispensation arises in the apostle's mind, he seizes it with his usual eagerness, and gives his readers a lesson on which Christians cannot dwell too long or too intensely. "God (I continue to give the meaning of Paul's words) has made us ministers of the new covenant, under a character entirely opposite to that of the mission of Moses. The law which Moses was sent to proclaim and establish was LITERAL; that which we are publishing to the world, has no LETTER: it is a law of PRINCIPLE; and herein consists the superiority of the Gospel above the law. A *literal* law is a burden which deadens the human mind; a *spiritual* law, on the contrary, adds activity and power, especially under the influence of that spirit of life which we have received, and of which we, the original preachers of the Gospel, have been appointed ministers. This is our title to the authority we claim of bearing witness to Christ, as his peculiar messengers, and to the honour due to that office. For if Moses received honour from God, though he was the minister of a *literal* law, from which the people subject to it could expect nothing but a constant sense of transgression, and the blame (the condemnation) of the law which they broke, how much more must our ministry be entitled to glory and honour, whose office is to proclaim a covenant which does not depend on VERBAL or LITERAL statutes, but which announcing the spirit of the Lord Jesus, which is a spirit of LIBERTY, invites mankind to cast off the yoke of statutes and ordinances of all kinds relating to religion, and thus to be free from all sin and the fear of sin?—a freedom which the most religious observers of the law of Moses, even when totally devoted to the fulfilment of the conditions of the Mosaic covenant, could not attain."

If this be the reasoning contained in the passage before us (as I trust you will find it upon due consideration, especially in connexion with the portion of the same chapter which I explained in my second Letter), what can be more plain and direct than the inference, that the apostle Paul considered the Gospel as being

subject to no LITERAL conditions; to demand no obedience to LITERAL PRECEPTS?—Now, I ask, is this LIBERTY consistent with the pretended law of Orthodoxy? Can any obedience be more burdened with verbal precepts and limitations than the dogmatic faith on which the various parties, called churches, will have salvation to depend? Precepts laid upon the mental faculties—LITERAL, VERBAL directions to the understanding, compelling it to admit certain propositions as true, in spite of the total indefiniteness of the impressions conveyed by the words, in opposition to previously established principles, and under the absolute necessity of taking the most inadequate material figures for the objects which they are said to represent,—such precepts are infinitely more burdensome than the whole Levitical law. The laws of sacrifice, of external purity, and of difference of meats, were definite and intelligible. The man who submitted to them was morally a slave; but he might know how far he had succeeded in the fulfilment of his ceremonial task. But if the most important part of the Gospel (as it is represented) consisted of intellectual PRECEPTS,—propositions directing Christians, upon pain of damnation, “how they are to think” (as the Athanasian Creed tells us\*) upon things beyond all the power of thought, we should be “of all men most miserable.” We might well envy the condition of the Jew, who, though loaded with precepts, could know with certainty whether he obeyed or failed. But how can we, when we embrace one particular Orthodoxy, be sure that we have not chosen a belief the very opposite of that which the metaphysical rule of right thinking, on what is beyond the pale of reason, intended? The Jew (to mention one out of a multitude of instances) well knew the composition of the *Water of Separation*; but what prophet can quiet men’s scruples as to the ingredients of a creed that shall contain neither more nor less than the true metaphysical deductions which may be drawn from the *letter* of the Old and the New Testament? The letter that killeth is declared by Paul not to belong to his ministry: could he, then, have been the minister of a dogmatic faith—of that double-edged sword, which, for so many centuries, is supposed to have been killing souls—ay, and bodies too—to right

\* Whosoever will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity.—*Athan. Creed.*

and left?—could he preach the accursing, the anathematizing, Gospel of Councils, Popes, and Synods, Catholic and Protestant, ancient and modern? Can any mortal calculate the millions of millions of souls which must, at this moment, be irrecoverably sunk in everlasting perdition, if the LETTER of the various Orthodoxies has been allowed to kill according to the wishes of their respective supporters?—if heresy be “a sin unto death?”

But let us suppose, for a moment (though I fear to weaken the impression of this argument), that St. Paul and his fellow labourers, the other apostles and immediate disciples of Christ, had preached a dogmatic faith, the genuineness of which was to be proved by its conformity with some LETTER, *i. e.* some declaration in writing. Where did that declaration exist? When did the apostles deliver it to the Christian world as the rule of its faith throughout all future ages? The law of Moses, because it depended upon the letter of the law, was solemnly delivered to the people of Israel, to be preserved and transmitted by means of authenticated documents; but when was anything of this kind performed by the apostles, much less by Christ himself\*?

Nothing is more difficult, when we treat of events which took place at a very distant period, than to divest ourselves of our modern notions, and never to lose sight of the then existing circumstances. We are so accustomed to see the Old and New Testament bound together, and to regard that collection as an individual book, written for the express purpose of establishing Christianity, that I fear many will be misled, in the present question, by the notion that St. Paul must have referred his converts to their BIBLE. That he referred the *Jews* to the Old Testament for predictions of the Messiah, *i. e.* for the conformity of the character described in those books with the character of Jesus of Nazareth, is certain; but we do not find that he recommended the same search to the Gentiles. Such a search, considering the difficulty and expense of obtaining manuscripts in those days, must have been impracticable to by far the greater part of the Gentile converts, even when we take in such as had learnt to read, and could understand the translation of the Septuagint. If the Christian society at Corinth, a

\* See note at the end.

wealthy, refined, and *learned* city, contained not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble\*, how few, capable of instruction by reading, must have been found among the semi-barbarian countries of Asia Minor, Phrygia, Cappadocia, Galatia, Pontus ; in a word, all the country except a few Greek cities ?

Now, in regard to the New Testament, we must not forget that the writings to which we give that name did not exist, *as a collection*, for a considerable time after the publication of Christianity : in fact, the *CAUSE* of their being made up into a collection, was the great increase of converts to the religion of Jesus. We must also remember that when our present New Testament was *collected*, there was not one of the apostles alive who could authoritatively deliver it as the *verbal* rule of faith to the Christian world. But *suppose* the collection known to the apostle John. He lived a long time at Ephesus, where the wildest notions on religion were afloat. He met with a most violent opposition, and was excommunicated by Diotrephes, who probably justified his conduct to the church by accusing John of some essential error†. His first two Epistles are full of complaints against that class of Gnostics who denied the reality of Christ's person. What could be more natural, in such circumstances, than to appeal to, and fully explain, the nature of the *RULE* which, from that time till the end of things, was to settle controversies of faith in the universal church ? But it is remarkable, that not only does not John refer to any such rule, but, even when he was *not received* by a church, he does not assert his right to be acknowledged as a supreme judge of disputed questions. Nay, in a part of his first Epistle, where he expressly cautions his disciples against men whom he calls *ANTICHRISTS* ; men, who had gone out from among St. John's society of Christians, and who, in the orthodox sense of the word, might properly be called *HERETICS*, the apostle appeals—to what ?—To his own inspiration ? To some fixed standard of faith ? No

\* 1st Cor. i, 26.

† I wrote unto the church ; but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, *receiveth us not.*" 3d John, v, 9. This letter of John is one of the apostolic writings which has been lost.

such thing. He refers to the JUDGMENT OF EACH INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN. "Ye have an unction (he says) from the Holy One, and ye know all things. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. . . . . Let that therefore abide in you which ye have HEARD (no written documents mentioned) from the beginning . . . These (things) have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you (no worse heretics in the modern sense could be described); but the anointing which ye have received of him, abideth in you: and *ye need not that any man teach you\**" . . . Can any one conceive that this address was made under the persuasion that Christ had intended to secure his Gospel, and the benefits arising from it, by a RULE of logical and metaphysical Orthodoxy? I leave the answer to the common sense and conscience of every unperverted mind.

But let me, if possible, prevent my being misunderstood. I have here stated some of the plainest *facts* which are attested in the New Testament; and they fully oppose the notion that the collection to which we give that name was prepared *with a view* to the controversies which have divided the church from the first days of Christianity to this moment. I might leave this statement to take its course. But, as the cloud of prejudice raised by Orthodoxy is apt to distort every ray of light which tries to penetrate it, I must, in the name of Christian charity, implore my readers not to suppose that I wish to disparage the value of the New Testament. What I have said proves only this—but it proves it to *me* beyond all doubt—that the New Testament was not appointed either by Christ or his apostles as *a means of settling abstract questions among Christians*. As an authentic record of the life of Christ, and of the simple yet sublime Gospel, which I have so frequently mentioned, as well as for every *practical* purpose of growth in the spirit of Christ, it absolutely has no rival; but *an appointed rule of Orthodoxy* for divinity, as *a speculative science*, it is not.

This being true in regard to the New Testament, who can think that the Hebrew Scriptures were appointed for that purpose? That they contain an authentic account of the divine

\* 1st John, ii.

dispensations which prepared the Gospel, I do believe; that they were justly considered by the Jews a divinely appointed rule of conduct *to them*, and that, as such, as long as the Jewish polity existed, it had the sanction of Christ and the apostles, I also believe. But I need not go about to prove, what must be clear to every mind not darkened by enthusiasm, that the Old Testament is not appointed to be the means of settling the points disputed among us.

I trust I need not remind you that the Roman Catholic evasion—the supposition of a perpetual, living, and infallible judge of the Scriptures—has been totally defeated by the Protestant writers. The very existence of such a flimsy theory is a superabundant proof of the great truth for which I have been contending: for since the necessity of such a living judge arises from the notion that Christian faith necessarily implies ORTHODOXY, the evident non-existence of such a judge proves the falsity of the notion, upon the admittance of which the judge becomes absolutely necessary. God, we certainly know, would not make any thing necessary for salvation, unless he had put that thing within the reach of every sincere inquirer after it. SAVING FAITH is, therefore, not ORTHODOXY. I know no proposition in divinity of which I feel more assured.

I request you now to fix an undivided attention on the inevitable consequence of the truth which I have established. If no living authority has been divinely established to explain the Scriptures on disputed points, is it not clear that those writings have been addressed equally to all men, in order that every one may endeavour to make out their sense by comparing different passages, and trying the explanations which he hears from others by the general SPIRIT of those Scriptures? In other words, is it not evident that God has left the sense of the Scriptures, as far as that sense is of practical importance, free to every sincere Christian, and entirely to the judgment of his REASON? Can any other judge be proved to exist? The answer is placed beyond all doubt. The independence of human reason from all responsibility, except that which man feels in his inmost soul to the Eternal Fountain of that reason, is demonstrated.

In the order of supernatural gifts, God has engaged (so at least I understand the Scripture) to bestow his Spirit on those who ask for assistance from him. But the gift of the SPIRIT, that *unction* of which St. John speaks\* (probably in allusion to the anointment of the Hebrew priests, the interpreters of the Old Law), was not intended as a check but as a GUIDE† to the rational mind of man. The Divine Spirit of TRUTH has been promised to sincere Christians, to guide them in all that concerns their salvation. The two SPIRITS—the Spirit (*i. e.* the mind, so we may call it without irreverence) of God, and the spirit of man, though infinitely apart from each other in their nature, are clearly represented by Paul as analogous (I might say *akin*) to each other‡. Nor could it be otherwise, since the one is the fountain-head of reason, the other a derived stream. Let us not, however, be misled by taking reason in the sense of some of its lesser powers or manifestations. By REASON in its highest sense—in that sense which Paul seems to convey when he speaks of that *spirit of man* which the *Spirit of God* assists, and with which the divine intelligence sympathizes, we should understand that part of human nature, that *multiform* faculty which constitutes man a RATIONAL being§. It is to this spirit of man—*i. e.* to his RATIONALITY, as opposed to every thing which he has in common with brutes (a collective notion which St. Paul calls the FLESH)—that the Spirit of Christ, or that Spirit of God which was eminently in Christ, is promised as a guide whenever the human will shall desire its influence. Yet the character in which this guide acts must unquestionably be that of REASON. Whatever theories may be conceived in regard to the manner of *inspiration*—visions, voices, internal

\* In the passage of his 1st Epistle, quoted before.

† “He will *guide* you into all the truth,” namely, of the simple Gospel.

‡ “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us (with sighs not expressed in words);” *i. e.* the divine impulse after holiness which is in us, makes us sigh for what we cannot express: but God, who gives us that Spirit, knows what it is we wish for.

§ “The consideration I shall have of it (reason) here... is as it stands for a faculty in man, that faculty whereby man is supposed to be distinguished from beasts, and wherein it is evident that he surpasses them.”—*Locke on Human Understanding*, b. 4, c. xvii.



impulses—the *reason* of the individual must be convinced of its reality, else it could not be distinguished from insanity. Every thing *not reasonable*, either in itself, or by virtue of the *ground* upon which we accept it, is *absurd*. REVELATION can have no authority for a rational being, till REASON has recognized it as such.

TO REASON, therefore, every Christian must address himself, in order to *prove all things, and hold fast that which is good*. Paul, who gave to his converts this highly *rational* direction, though acquainted with the extraordinary powers which fitted him for his ministry, was perfectly aware of the inalienable rights which the Supreme Source of the intellectual faculties has conferred upon human reason. He never speaks in the tone of an oracle to which reason must bow, without examining its claims. “I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say\*.” From the bold assumption of oracular infallibility, and the attempt to strike awe into the minds of those they address, the writings of Christ’s apostles are perfectly free. That sort of language is characteristic of the pretenders to inspiration. Such is the tone constantly assumed by Mahomet. “There is no doubt in this book,” is the first declaratory sentence in the Koran†.

There are no attempts in the New Testament to paralyze the reason of man. Throughout that morally wonderful collection of writings, the Spirit of God, as it manifests itself in Christ and his apostles, appears with the tone and character of a friend, a helper, which feels for, and identifies itself with, the spirit of man. Every one is earnestly invited, not indeed to quench his own spirit, but to exert its powers so as not to *quench* in himself the mild flame of the Spirit of God.

God dwells in the true Christian by that direct ray of divine light, called *reason* (I speak of the highest part of reason), as in his temple. This indwelling of the Deity, this presence of the Supreme Reason, may be truly asserted of all mankind. The *Logos*, the Divine Reason (of which, in regard to religion, Christ is the human representative), is the “true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world‡.” But it

\* 1st Cor. x, 15.

† Sale’s Koran, c. ii.

‡ John i, 9.

is the peculiar power of the Gospel not only to remove the impurities which obscure that ray of divine light, but also to enlarge the capacity of the human mind, so as to make it more and more fit, by that moral purity which, in scripture language, is called sanctification, to be the dwelling of that *rational* and *holy* presence, which in figurative language is called the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, God himself\*.

The invitations of the Gospel are all addressed to the intelligent, moral part of man—to his *practical reason*. “Consider what I say (is St. Paul’s language to Timothy), and the Lord give thee *understanding* in all things†.” The word here used by the apostle, *σύνεσις* (*synesis*), expresses the highest, the essential faculty of the *spirit* of man. By that faculty must the free, the accountable agent, Man, be *ultimately* guided, whatever assistance, *i. e.* whatever increase of *rationality*, he may receive from the fountain of reason; otherwise he would not be a free agent‡.

May the time soon arrive, when the notion of a natural opposition between REASON and REVELATION shall be exploded! The “carnal mind, which is enmity against God,” is not REASON, but its very opposite. It is the animal part of man. When this animal part, with its blind appetites, has, by a determination of the will, been submitted to the law of the SPIRIT (which is the law of pure, divine REASON), to the law of Christian motives, of Christian filial love to God, as we know him through Christ—that moment our SPIRIT, our superior or mental portion, which is properly *ourselves*, begins a process of identification with the Spirit of God, that assisting power which “helps

\* “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”—1 Cor. iii, 16, 17. This is a sublime truth, in which (as it must be in all cases) *true* philosophy coincides with the spirit of the New Testament. That St. Paul understood by God, or his Spirit, the *rational* part of man, that part of us which partakes of the Divine nature, seems to me clear from the conclusion which the writer draws against encouraging the mere animal propensities. “If any man (he concludes) *defile* the temple of God, him shall God destroy.” No argument is so powerful against animal degradation as that which arises from our *rationality*.

† 2d Tim. ii, 7.

‡ See note at the end.

our infirmities:" from that moment we are in the way of *safety*, we are SAVING OURSELVES, σωζόμενοι (*soozomenoi*). If, nevertheless, our reason, though sincerely placed by our will under the guidance of the Spirit of God, still rejects tenets which other Christians declare to be necessary to salvation, if our SPIRIT cannot be "fully persuaded" that such doctrines are contained in the Scriptures; we need not be alarmed at the clamour of the Orthodox, for unquestionably they have not been appointed to be our judges.

I will conclude with one of the many passages in St. Paul's Epistles, which would place the intellectual or spiritual liberty of Christians beyond doubt, were it not for the thick mist which the established theological prejudices have cast over the Scriptures. The words which I am about to quote relate to a question considered as of vital importance in St. Paul's time. The observance or non-observance of the Law, in connexion with the hopes of salvation given by the Gospel, was then an essential point in controversy. I ardently pray that Christians of all denominations may imbibe the spirit of St. Paul's advices relating to that question, and apply it to our present divisions. "Him that is weak in the faith receive, but not to doubtful disputations... Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?... But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ... so then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. *Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall in his brother's way\**." How many, alas! are daily made to fall away from Christ by the stumbling-block of ORTHODOXY!

\* Rom. xiv.

## LETTER IV.

## ON HERESY AND ORTHODOXY.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

THE word Heresy, among Christians, is derived from the New Testament. If we consult the nine passages in which *αἵρεσις* (*hairesis*) is used by the sacred writers, and the only one in which a heretic\* is mentioned, we shall find the word in question representing various notions, all of which have a common basis—namely, the idea of dissension occasioned by individual choice. All such unions as we call, in some cases, sects, in others parties, were or might be named *αἱρέσεις* (*haireseis*). That name did not necessarily imply reproach nor the maintenance of erroneous doctrines as a bond of the union. The first connexion of the word heresy with reproach, in the language of the apostle Paul, arises from the notion of practical discord and dissension. Paul, indeed, uses the words divisions, and heresies, as equivalent. “I hear (he says to the Corinthians, 1st Cor. xi, 18 and 19) that there are divisions among you; and I partly believe it; for there must be also heresies among you†.” This sense of the word had not become quite obsolete even at so late a period as the fifth century. Chrysostom, in the beginning of that century, and Theodoret, in the middle of it, explained the

\* Acts v, 17; xv, 5; xxiv, 5, 14; xxvi, 5; xxviii, 22.—1st Cor. xi, 19.—Gal. v, 20.—2d Peter, ii, 1. The word *αἱρετικός* (*haireticos*) is found only in Tit. iii, 10.

† The addition also of *καί*, may appear, at first sight, to establish an important distinction between divisions and heresies, but the context shews the contrary. The only distinction which it admits is, perhaps, that of accidental dissensions (*σχίσματα*, *schismata*), and permanent or regularly formed parties (*αἱρέσεις*).

passage of St. Paul, just quoted, as one in which *dissensions*, not dogmatic errors, were deprecated by the apostle\*.

But the abuse which finally reduced the word heresy to the signification of damnable error, began at a very early period.—The age in which Christianity appeared was one of metaphysical speculation. Those who, like the learned, pious, and philosophical *Neander*, have attentively studied whatever documents, both of oriental and occidental literature, are preserved relative to that period, have discovered the clearest proofs of an universal excitement, a vehement longing for disclosures concerning the moral nature of man, his hopes and his fears (inasmuch as these transcend the narrow limits of this life), which, more or less, pervaded all classes of men in all civilized countries. This mental restlessness was not confined to the East. Rome itself exhibited the same ferment of mind in the rage for foreign mysteries and initiations, which invited to that capital crowds of priests from the most distant parts of the empire. The senate, at an earlier period, and the emperors, at that of which I am speaking, were often alarmed by this spirit: and no deep reading in the works of the first, second, and third centuries is required to be acquainted with the fact, that the *Mathematici*, *i. e.* professors of divination by means of numbers, charms, and astrology, obtained a most powerful influence at Rome, for which they, not unfrequently, paid dearly, in banishment and other punishments.

The ardent imaginations of the Eastern people were, however, the most appropriate receptacle for every speculative extravagance. From a remote period, various systems of theological doctrines had existed among the orientals, which, under different shapes and modifications, may still be recognized as descended from a common origin, and may be traced back to the regions of the Indus and Ganges. Even the Jews, who, from the nature of their religious and political constitution, might have been sup-

\* Lardner quotes the following words from Suicer, under the word *Αἵρεσις*. Diximus vocem *αἵρεσις* hac tertiâ significatione sumi, 1 Cor. xi, 19. Hic tamen dissimulandum non est, veteres non intelligere doctrinam orthodoxiæ contrariam, sed contentiones, &c.—*Lardner*, vol. iv, p. 506, edition in 5 vols.

posed to be out of the reach of every thing which did not originate in Moses, could not escape the general infection. But the captivity which the mass of the nation underwent in Assyria brought the Jews into a close contact with the learned Chaldeans, who, at Babylon, cultivated a branch of one of the principal stems of Indian philosophy. From Babylon, therefore, was derived that doctrine, afterwards called the Cabbala, on the knowledge of which some Rabbies of our Saviour's time built their highest claims to celebrity. It is true that there were essential differences between what we may call the mystic systems of the Jews and those of other Eastern nations. Yet the Eastern Gnosis, as well as the traditional science of the Rabbies, had this important character in common—that the adepts in both boasted of their being in possession of secret and mysterious traditions, which, carrying conviction in themselves, scorned argumentative proof; and, by means of which, not only were the secrets of creation and the source of physical and moral evil disclosed, but men were put in possession of several ultramundane facts, and fixed laws connected with those facts, by means of which the initiated were enabled to perform the greatest wonders within the limits of this lowest of all the departments of creation, which has been allotted to mankind.

In such a state of things it was most natural that the appearance of so very extraordinary a person as Jesus of Nazareth, whose wonderful powers were not denied even by his bitterest enemies, whose birth was narrated with circumstances which made it appear a *physical* effect of causes beyond the limits of this material world; who seemed to speak of himself as having come down from a sphere of existence raised far above this of ours, where sin, and pain, and death bear rule;—on the appearance of such a teacher, followed by the <sup>\*</sup>preaching and the miracles of his immediate disciples, it was most natural that the attention of all the speculatists of the age should be turned to Christianity, and that, finding it infinitely better grounded than their own baseless systems, they should endeavour to use it as a foundation for those systems. You must have observed how the great physical discoveries of our times have been seized upon by various classes of theorists, in the common hope that every

one should find in oxygen, Galvanism, magnetism, or whatever new agent had come to view, the very corner-stone of his respective theory. At a time when the human mind worked entirely upon itself, and philosophers were universally agreed in giving external or objective existence to whatever their minds conceived as necessary—in other words, which will probably be more familiar to you—at a time when philosophy consisted in an unbounded system of realism, which to every idea of the mind gave an independent existence in the universe; nothing could be more acceptable than a tangible point, a standing-place, upon which those mighty fabrics of the imagination, those theosophical systems, which were vended about as mysteries of the highest interest and value to man, might repose. Thus it happened in regard to the Gospel. Christianity had been published only a very few years, when all the mystic and speculative sects in Syria commenced a series of efforts to incorporate the Gospel with their own tenets, and to graft their peculiar notions on the young and vigorous stock, whose branches they could not but perceive were about to spread over the face of the earth. Although the writers in the New Testament do not mention the name of any philosophical sect, except the Pharisees and Sadducees, it is clear to those acquainted with the doctrines of eastern philosophy that the notions from which Paul especially apprehended a danger to the simplicity of the Gospel, belonged to those mystic systems which, in some instances, combined with Judaism, in others directly opposing it, were widely diffused, soon after, under the name of Gnosis.

But no warnings were sufficient to prevent a rapid growth of the evil which the great apostle feared and opposed. Men whose resources for wealth and distinction lay in the admiration of the multitude, saw a most favourable opportunity of rising in the world, by availing themselves of the ardour with which the primitive converts had embraced the Gospel. Vain babblers, pretending to a deep and extensive knowledge of the invisible world, flocked to the infant Christian communities; and, such was their power over the ignorant and simple minds which made up the great majority of those societies, that the miraculously gifted founders of them found it difficult to maintain their own

authority against them. Paul's distressing difficulties at Corinth are too vividly and feelingly described in his two Epistles to the church of that great city, to require assistance from another pen. But no tolerably well-instructed reader of the New Testament can doubt that Paul's rivals belonged to the class of Judeo-philosophical speculatists. Paul's express determination to lay down all claim to that kind of knowledge which our version denominates wisdom (*σοφία, sophia*), and to confine his teaching to the doctrine of "Jesus Christ, and him crucified," clearly points out by contrast, what kind of preaching had seduced the minds of his converts. It is true that the apostle mentions the names of James, Cephas, and Apollos, men who, as we certainly know, were guiltless of the spirit of party which made use of their names to oppose the authority of Paul. That the persons thus named were not really leaders of those divisions is proved by the appearance of Paul's own name as the watchword of a party. Even the name of Christ was, we find, used for a similar purpose. The fact seems to have been, that, when various intruders undertook to reduce the Gospel to a philosophical system, each of them pretended to build his own speculations on the peculiar views—sometimes real, sometimes supposed—of the persons whose names they adopted as a party<sup>1</sup> distinction.

Besides the many remarkable passages of the two Epistles to the Corinthians, in which Paul's renunciation of all scientific teaching pointedly marks, in his rivals, a dangerous affectation of deep philosophy, there is a circumstance in the notices preserved concerning Apollos which is strongly confirmatory of my view, that the attempts of various teachers to theorize on Christianity was the chief source of Paul's anxiety. It is on record\* that Apollos was a native of Alexandria, the great seat of speculative philosophy at that period. This fact alone would be a fair ground for conjecturing that he belonged to the numerous class of Alexandrian Jews who, like Philo, united the study of the Old Testament with the idealistic and mystic system which was taught in the schools of that great city. But this conjecture will grow almost into certainty when the word which, in the

\* Acts xviii, 24.



English version, is translated *eloquent*, shall be expressed by *learned*, which gives the true sense of λόγιος (*logios*) in that passage\*.

In the public disputations with the Jews, Apollos must have found it necessary to employ all the subtleties of the Alexandrian school in defence of Christianity. He may at a subsequent period have been checked by Paul in the use of weapons which, though of service in dialectic contests, would be eventually injurious to the simplicity of the Christian system. But vain and light-minded Christians would naturally be allured by the public triumph of the Alexandrian, to imitate and (as second-rate minds will always do) to exaggerate Apollos's manner and method. As we have the most powerful reasons to believe that Apollos himself was not actually at the head of an anti-Paulistic party, but remained in close friendship with the apostle, we may safely conclude that his name was adopted for the purpose of expressing the nature of the system which his imitators professed to follow. In a similar manner we must conceive that the names of James (who, as the local president of the congregation of Jerusalem, could not reside at Corinth) and of Cephas (who, as the apostle of the circumcision, is not likely to have ever been in Greece) were taken by other portions of the Corinthian church, under the guidance of teachers who respectively pretended to follow the views which they described as peculiar to each of those distinguished apostles.

When once the notion that an essential part of Christianity consists in a system of speculative doctrines began to take root, it must have made a very rapid progress. A Christian teacher, full of the true spirit and power which Christ promised for the

\* Neander, from whose instructive and interesting history of the apostolic age—*Pflanzung und Leitung der Christlichen Kirche durch die Apostel*—I borrow this remark, observes that the peculiar service rendered by Apollos to the Christians was that of *confuting* the Jews in public disputations—*ἐυτὼς γὰρ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις διακατηλέγχετο*—an ability which depends much rather on dialectics and metaphysics than on eloquence. Neander confirms the above given signification of λόγιος by two passages, one of Josephus, *de Bello*, *Jud.* vi, c. v, § 3, and another of Philo, *de Vita Mosis*, i, § 5. Josephus uses the word λόγοι in opposition to *ιδιώται*. Three words of Philo are enough to shew that he agrees in the same signification: *ἀγρυπτεῖν δὲ λόγοι*.

purpose of announcing the simple and sublime truth of salvation through him, might easily employ a long life in announcing these "good tidings" to a world morally sinking under the double pressure of vice and superstition. But the case of a *nominal* Christian preacher is quite different. In both ancient and modern times the *sounding brass* and *tinkling cymbals*, among the Christian teachers, have deeply felt the necessity of abstract theories to raise and maintain their personal importance. The heathen priesthoods were indispensable to heathen nations, on the ground that priests alone possessed the mysterious knowledge of the numerous and intricate performances by which the gods were rendered propitious. But Christ had appointed no *priesthood*. Nevertheless the natural tendency of the human mind raised a confused notion that the presidents and directors of Christian congregations must be equivalent to the *priests* of other religions. But here again the absence of complicated ceremonies left this class of men without an office, so peculiar to them as to make them indispensable to the unofficial part of the community. How, then, could the ambitious and worldly-minded rest satisfied in such a position? We know that they did not. The supposed necessity of both mysterious doctrines and mysterious ceremonies, was soon set afloat by Christian teachers of that class of which the apostles Paul, James, and John, complain in their writings. The materials for such speculations were already present in great abundance. The Old Testament, on the one hand, had become for a very great part of the Jewish nation, and especially for the Alexandrian Jews, a collection of allegories: numerous theories about a long series of incorporeal emanations from God were, on the other hand, the favourite subject of the then prevalent philosophy. In these circumstances it was that speculations about the nature of Christ had their origin. I shall here introduce to your notice only one instance of these speculative corruptions, as a specimen of a numerous class of errors which infested Christianity during the first three centuries.

One of the earliest heresies (I shall now use that word in the ecclesiastical acceptation) was that of the Ebionites—Jewish converts to Christianity; forming a sect whose name offers an

insurmountable difficulty to the ecclesiastical historian, since it is impossible to ascertain whether that appellation is derived from a Hebrew word which signifies a *pauper*, or from the founder of the sect. The former derivation is, however, more probable than the other. The information which we have about the doctrines of the Ebionites comes through Epiphanius, a bishop of the fifth century, a man of the most bigotted, narrow, and passionate mind. But in comparing what he says of these heretics with what is known of the ancient Jewish Gnostics, considerable light is derived, and the substance of their views may be reduced to this.

The aim of all Gnostic systems was simply to account for the existence of evil, without implicating the moral character of God. By a very absurd, yet too natural, blunder, all the Gnostics conceived that this might be accomplished by means of a system of emanations from God, which should place all imperfections at a very great distance from him. Hence the chain of generations of worlds, which they conceived as having for its lowest link man, and this earth, was almost interminable. The immediate emanations from God were, of course, the highest and most perfect. As to the origin of the evil which had mixed with the more remote emanations, the Gnostics were divided. Some conceived an eternal and self-existent power of evil and darkness, which, having seduced some of the beings descended from God, succeeded in corrupting his creation. Others explained the imperfection and consequent evil of the lower parts of the universe as a natural degeneracy, originating in their distance from the supreme and all-perfect Being.

Among the Jewish Gnostics, who generally incorporated their theosophical systems with their national scriptures, there were many, as the Ebionites, who asserted the existence of, what may be called, a **MODEL MAN**, a most perfect being, very nearly or immediately descended from God, who was the **TYPE** of perfect mankind. This **SPIRITUAL MAN** was originally united with Adam, but was forced to separate himself from our first parent on account of his sin. Desirous, however, of recovering our fallen race, the model man appeared united to the most holy men mentioned in the Old Testament. Finally, he fully pos-

sessed the person of Jesus of Nazareth ; and, having controuled every action of his life, directing them all to the purpose of collecting the elect out of the world, deserted him on the cross. The kingdom, however, of this model man, according to these dreamers, will be a glorious one ; and the true followers of Jesus will be the happy members of it, in the high regions which peculiarly belong to that pure emanation of the divine nature.

You are probably astonished at the absurdity as well as the capriciousness of such a system, and will not easily account for the fact of its having a succession of followers for about four centuries. Such, however, is the power of whatever exists in the minds of men, as the groundwork of, what may be called, their philosophical notions. The highest state of intellectual refinement is necessary to prevent such notions from mixing with every thing which the mind subsequently receives. I believe that, some generations after us, people will feel an astonishment similar to your's, upon learning the intimate connexion which, in our days, is allowed to exist between what most Christians conceive to be saving faith and the scholastic notions of past ages. The notions of *substance*, of *properties* or *attributes*, of *natures*, of *persons*, of *matter*, of *form*, and many others which at present constitute so very important a part of the orthodox doctrines, were they not so familiar to our ears and minds, would not appear less strange than the model man, and the emanations of the Gnostics. But the notions of these emanations, before the appearance of Christianity, existed in many a mind as a sublime part of science : they were a branch of the philosophy of that age, and, as such, they attached themselves to the Gospel, as soon as the Christians most unwisely allowed that the revelation of God through Jesus was, in any way, directed to inform mankind concerning the nature of the Deity and his modes of existence ; the manner in which he might unite himself with an individual of the human species, and act in that individual without destroying his personality, his human will, and his human nature. When the necessity of any such kind of faith was admitted, there was no possibility of escaping philosophical corruptions and their long train of evils. Divines

found themselves compelled to choose some philosophical language and some philosophical views among those which were in existence: the dominant church party, on the other hand, was induced to raise some other philosophy to the dignity of Orthodoxy, degrading and persecuting all other theories as damnable heresies.

There existed but one method of avoiding these evils: to avoid the philosophy of those ages; never to make any philosophical *theory* whatever a part of the Christian doctrine. Such was the method recommended by Paul; but this method would ill accord with the ambition, the love of power and wealth, which, even in the time of the apostles (as we know from Paul's testimony\*), broke out among the leaders of Christian churches. Let me again invite your attention, for a few moments, to the Gospel, without Orthodoxy, that you may see how utterly unfit it is for the purpose of worldly-minded men.

The Gospel, without Orthodoxy, is an invitation to the whole of mankind, without distinction of Jew or Gentile, slave or freeman, to acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as their only guide in matters concerning their souls; to receive him as the only person whom they may trust in regard to the conditions of obtaining the pardon of moral offences, and the promise of happiness in a future life. This invitation was originally made by Christ himself, carried on by his immediate disciples, and intended to be continued till the end of the world, through the zeal and activity of a succession of believers in Christ. The New Testament was (we may reasonably suppose; for as it was not authoritatively delivered, but spontaneously collected, we have no other ground for the assertion) intended by Providence to perpetuate some historical facts concerning Christ and his apostles, as also some doctrines and moral admonitions. The propagation of these documents has been left to the care of Christians; but no AUTHORITY has been bestowed on any human being to interpret these books to others. We find, in various parts of those books, a promise of individual guidance, by means of a

\* Νομιζόντων πορισμὸν εἶναι τὴν εὐσίχαιον; *supposing that godliness is an income.* 1st Tim. vi, 5.

secret influence called the SPIRIT OF CHRIST\*. Of this influence it is said, that it will guide the believers *into* all the TRUTH: and, since the design of Christ's mission was the spiritual safety† or SALVATION of his followers, that Truth must be such a portion of the infinite Truth which exists in God, as is necessary for the salvation or spiritual safety of *each individual*. We have, indeed, no authority to assume that, in such an immense variety of character and circumstances as we observe among mankind, the same identical notions and convictions are necessary in all to produce a salutary state of moral feeling, or that conformity of the human will to the will of God (as it is made known to us by Christ), which seems to be the essence of the Christian faith demanded in the New Testament. Under these circumstances, we may fairly compare Christianity to a moral SCHOOL opened for all mankind. The indispensable condition for admission, is the reception of Christ, as supreme MASTER concerning every thing connected with religion. Whoever professes this acceptance of Christ, is a Christian. The person thus admitted to *learn*, must use his best endeavours, in the first place, to obtain by prayer and purity of life the invisible guidance which Christ has promised: he must, in the second place, habitually study the records which we have of Christ's words and examples, as well as the writings of his apostles, which Providence has preserved, availing himself of every assistance within his reach, including, of course, instruction from other Christians, especially such as have devoted themselves to the study of those records. But every member of this spiritual school should remember that he is only a DISCIPLE, like all the rest: the school has only one MASTER‡, Jesus Christ, and to him, under God, are the pupils accountable for their progress.

\* See note at the end.

† The word which we translate salvation is not of Christian origin. It was used with all its grammatically allied terms, by philosophers before the age of the apostles. It means indefinitely moral safety. The man who is in that state may well commit himself to God in regard to *eternal* safety, without knowing much about its nature.

‡ Be not many masters. James iii, 1.

Could such a system afford the least advantage to men who wished for rule over others?—Impossible. Establish, however, the necessity of ORTHODOXY; make Christianity consist, not in sincere, internal, subjection of the mind to God, as we are taught by our MASTER, but in the acceptance of some particular abstract views—views not relative to our affections and conduct, but to the *nature of things* in the invisible world, and chiefly to the nature of God himself; allow SECONDARY TEACHERS, whose decisions you are to follow either as an infallible rule, or as an authority which, though not infallible, it is morally wrong to reject; and you will instantly perceive the immense power which these teachers will have over all who put themselves under them. It is true that these men will have a great number of rivals; but in proportion to their multitude, and the uncertainty of their claims, will be the arbitrary value which those who expect to be saved by acquiescence in *orthodox* opinions must bestow on that standard which they choose for themselves. Now, since ORTHODOXY is a title to power, it must act upon the human mind just as any other instrument of ambition. Since ORTHODOXY is the bond which unites large bodies of men under the guides of that ORTHODOXY; and HETERODOXY, or HERESY, raises antagonist bodies, under rulers who are thus made dangerous rivals of the orthodox; such a principle of union and opposition must act like opposite and rival patriotisms: yet with this important difference, that one patriotism *may* allow a certain sympathy with another; but this feeling cannot exist between two creeds. *Orthodoxy* is exclusive, and cannot grant the existence of another: its essential character is the determination to bring the whole of mankind under its own dominion. Men organized into a body, as professors of Orthodoxy, will resist and avenge, to the full extent of their power, every attempt to dissolve the vital principle of their UNION.

But, like any other political body, an ORTHODOX church will readily perceive that nothing unites bodies of men so strongly as opposition to others. A state of warfare, especially with neighbours, makes patriotism a violent passion, and consolidates the union of those who fight under its banners. Hence the fact, which every page of ecclesiastical history attests, that condemna-

tion of others is the very soul of orthodoxy. No ORTHODOX man is satisfied that he believes his own doctrine, unless he condemns from his heart every one who dissents from him. To prove the truth of this assertion, beyond doubt, I have only to refer to the acts of every council and synod which has been celebrated in the Christian world. Every kind of ORTHODOXY, in fact, essentially supposes a HETERODOXY in the sense of a wrong and damnable system. But here you may observe the steps by which DISSENT was gradually made a crime, and how it was identified with practical DISSENSION—the HERESY which the apostle Paul justly deprecates. I beg you to remark the original and etymological meaning of heterodoxy. That word only expresses DIFFERENCE of doctrine. Like the word HERESY, its original and essential notion is DIFFERENCE. It must, therefore, be acknowledged that, at the period when those two words, HERESY and HETERODOXY, began to be used by Christians, the notion that difference of doctrine is inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity was not common and established.

But the fact, of which those very ancient ecclesiastical words still bear traces, may be positively and historically confirmed. The earliest Christian writer from whose pen we have, what may properly be called, a collection of literary works, is Justin the Martyr. The publication of his principal writings took place about A.D. 140. One of his most important works is a Dialogue, in which he introduces a Jew, under the name of Trypho, with whom Justin discusses, at great length, the claims of Christianity to be considered as a divine revelation. With the merits of that work we have, at present, nothing to do: I only mention it to prove the fact, that, so late as the middle of the second century, persons who, professing that Christ had no higher nature than that of a man, received him nevertheless as the Messiah, were not supposed to have lost their baptismal claims to the name and privilege of Christians. This fact clearly appears in Justin's Dialogue. In answer to the repeated objections of the Jew against the doctrine which supposes the existence of more than one divine person, Justin says, that, even if Christians could not prove that the Being who appeared as Jesus of Nazareth had not existed before he was born in the world as a man,



they would only be convicted of a mistake: and adds, that this question should be entirely separated from that of Jesus being the CHRIST—the MESSIAH. “For (I translate the most important part of the passage) there are, (I said) my friends\*, some of us (literally, some of our sort) who, confessing him to be Christ, yet declare him to be a man descended from men. With these persons I do not agree; nor would most of those who believe with me say what those persons say†.” Here we find the original tone of mind which the apostles had endeavoured to produce among Christians in respect to abstract doctrines. The point to which Justin alludes is one which most divines among us consider as the very essence of Christian faith. Justin himself, with almost all his contemporary Christians of Gentile extraction, believed that Christ had existed, in a nature approaching to the divine, before he became man. But, instead of flinging curses and anathemas at the Nazarenes, or the Ebionites (it is not quite certain to which of these primitive Unitarians he alludes), he modestly expresses his dissent from them, without, however, questioning their Christianity.—No doctrine concerning the nature of things, either in God or in man, was as yet supposed to be a part of the Gospel revelation. The surrender of the will to the will of God through Christ, the hope of salvation under his guidance, and through that faith in his promises which produces obedience to his precepts—such were, in the opinion of the best Christians, down to the middle of the second century, the only conditions of Christian fellowship.

This tolerant and charitable temper had, indeed, nearly disappeared about one hundred years after Justin; but it was not absolutely extinct. The pious, the learned, though mystical and fanciful, Origen‡ has recorded his regret at the intolerance

\* Trypho is represented in the Dialogue as attended by some companions.

† Καὶ γὰρ εἰσὶ τινες, ὧ φίλοι, ἔλεγον, ἀπὸ τοῦ ἡμετέρου γένους, εἶναι ἀνθρώπων δὲ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων γενόμενον ἀποφαινόμενοι, οἷς οὐ συντίθεμαι, ὅδ᾽ ἂν πλεῖστοι τὰυτα μοι δοξασαντες, εἶποιεν. Bishop Bull contends that, instead of ἡμετέρου, we ought to read ὑμετέρου. But, besides that there is not the least authority from manuscripts for this change, what difference would this make? Justin’s argument depends entirely on the concession, that the Divinity, or rather the superhuman and *Godlike* nature of Christ, is not the essential point in question, but only his being the promised Messiah.

‡ Flourished about A.D. 230.

which was already prevalent in his time. In allusion to the Ebionites, a Christian sect of whose real character and doctrines (as it constantly happens in ecclesiastical history) we can know nothing with certainty, except that, to the orthodox party, they were an object of the most violent and unqualified abuse, Origen has a remarkable passage. Having related the affecting history of the blind man, near Jericho, who, in spite of the threatenings of the multitude, persevered in his prayer for sight till he obtained that boon from Jesus, Origen compares the Ebionite Unitarians to the blind man, and the Gentile Christians (who were then approaching to the notions to which the Council of Nice, supported by imperial power, gave ascendancy) to the multitude who would not allow the blind to implore the mercy of the Saviour. "Nevertheless (says Origen), although the multitudes command him to be silent, he cries much the more, because he believed in Jesus, though he believed in him rather humanly\*, and in a loud voice says to him, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." In this truly modest and tolerant spirit were the Ebionites of his time treated by the profoundly learned, excellent, and cruelly persecuted Origen. "How different (observes the pious TRINITARIAN Neander, marking his own words for emphasis), how totally different, many things would have been if men had, in this spirit of love and liberty, allowed free course to the grace of the Saviour over all who call upon him; if they had considered the various points of view of the Christian progress towards the ripeness of manhood in the faith; and had not determined to reduce by force the various kinds of minds to one and the same measure†!"

But a totally opposite spirit had already obtained ascendancy among Christians. The presidents of congregations who had

\* πιστεύων μιν ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰησοῦν, ἀνθρωπικώτερον δὲ πιστεύων. It is this identical notion—that to believe Christ's nature to be only *human*, is to form a *low* conception of him—it is this explaining the Scriptures according to *senti-ment*, which has made, in all ages, the Athanasian interpretation so popular. The whole passage of Origen is to be found in his Commentary on Matthew, part XVI, vol. 3, pp. 773 and 774. *Paris. ed. Delarue.*

† Neander, *Geschichte*, vol. 1, part 2, page 408. He adds, that Origen was aware of the fact, that the Ebionites, whose prejudices were thoroughly Jewish, condemned the apostle Paul as a corruptor of the Gospel. Yet Origen did not reject those men as necessarily unchristian!

monopolized the title of Bishops, formerly common to all Presbyters, were now fully aware of the importance of establishing the exclusive claims of one party against all others, to be considered as the sole possessors and distributors of *genuine Christianity*. Forming an united body, upon the plan of the political confederacies of the Greeks, the majority of the Christian bishops became a most tyrannical aristocracy. The love of power and of gain combined with their very general narrow-mindedness, ignorance, and intolerance, in transforming those passions which, for the sake of distinction from the animal appetites, might well be called the SPIRITUAL PASSIONS, into the highest and most important virtues. ORTHODOXY, *i. e.* the spurious philosophical notions which this confederacy had adopted in connexion with the Gospel, was made essential to Christianity. Whoever did not hold the same views, was declared an enemy of Christ and religion : and as the confederacy extended itself over the face of the Roman empire, the unfortunate being who incurred the condemnation of his Bishop, in some obscure town of a semi-barbarous corner of the Roman territory, was regularly hunted down by all the orthodox associates, till, as it actually happened to multitudes in later times, he was forced either to submit, or to take refuge among the barbarous nations, who in such cases were always found more charitable and humane than the Christian clergy.—Thus ORTHODOXY converted the religion of love and charity into a source of some of the worst evils which have oppressed mankind, and which even the rapid progress of knowledge in our own days, seems still unable totally to subdue.

## LETTER V.

## ON THE PRIDE OF REASON.

"Je vous applaudis fort lorsque vous voulez que la foi soit fondée en raison; sans cela, pourquoi préférons-nous la Bible à l'Alcoran ou aux anciens livres des Bramiens? Aussi nos théologiens et autres savans hommes l'ont-ils reconnu, et c'est ce qui nous a fait avoir de si beaux ouvrages de la vérité de la religion Chrétienne, et tant de belles preuves qu'on a mises en avant contre les païens et autres mécréans anciens et modernes. Aussi les personnages sages ont toujours tenu pour suspects ceux qui ont prétendu qu'il ne fallait point se mettre en peine des raisons et preuves quand il s'agit de croire; chose impossible, en effet, *à moins que croire signifie réciter ou répéter et laisser passer sans s'en mettre en peine, comme font bien des gens, et comme c'est même le caractère de quelques nations plus que d'autres.*" *Leibnitz, Nouveaux Essais: quoted by Victor Cousin, Hist. de la Philosophie, t. ii, p. 474.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

THE notion of Orthodoxy, among Protestants, like some hotly hunted debtors, has been obliged to leave its pursuers at fault, by crossing into another jurisdictional district. Orthodoxy, finding itself unsafe in the domains of argument, flies towards those of moral sentiment; and just at the moment when it might be expected to surrender, it turns sharply round, and boldly charges REASON with SIN. This is an alarming change. Before this moral discovery, we exerted our reason to the utmost of our power, confident that we had no spiritual danger to fear: now, most unfortunately, we are made to suspect that our sin may be great in proportion to the power of our arguments. What, indeed, in common language, we call PRIDE, is usually connected with *power*, and the existence of the latter is, for most people, a pretty strong presumption of the presence of the former. It must therefore happen, that, when reason is accused of pride, the charge will appear already more than half-substantiated, if reason has been too hard for the opponents. Power of any kind, unless it can reward and punish to a certain degree, is not an enviable possession. I have no doubt that if a *sin*, to be called PRIDE OF SIGHT, had been as necessary to some influential class, as the PRIDE OF REASON is to the orthodox

parties all over the world ; every long and sharp-sighted man, who wished to live in peace, and avoid the scandal of discovering things, which his neighbours either could not or would not see, would now be obliged to wear spectacles.

PRIDE OF REASON ? What can it be ? I confess that having, for a long time, been honestly endeavouring to find out the exact meaning of that phrase, as applied in theological controversy, I have not yet quite deciphered it. It might be expected that those who use it would explain it ; but they will not take that trouble. I shall therefore be obliged to try what I can do in making out what they mean.

PRIDE is a vice : no one who uses that word doubts it. But what does it consist in ? Few stop to ascertain that point.— I go, in the first place, to Cruden's Concordance, a book remarkable for definitions or descriptions of important words, frequently used in the Scriptures, and am disappointed to find none. But, fortunately, Dr. Johnson gives no less than *seven* meanings of the word. Out of this number, however, only *two*, as implying something *wrong*, can be of service in my present inquiry.

1st. " Inordinate and unreasonable self-esteem."

2d. " Insolence, rude treatment of others ; insolent exultation."

We will, if you please, treasure up these two explanations of the great lexicographer.

I have laid it down, as unquestionable, that *pride* means a *vice* ; and I find a proof of the *unfavourable* signification of the word, in the established phrase *honest pride*. If *pride* did not, essentially, signify something wrong and vicious, it would not be necessary to qualify it, in certain cases, by means of the addition, *honest*. The existence of such a phrase as the one last mentioned, clearly shews that there is a human sentiment, which has no proper name in English (I do not recollect any modern language that possesses it), and which is expressed by that of a *vice*, modified by another word, which signifies something virtuous. What, then, is that sentiment ? What do we mean by *honest pride* ? I believe these words signify *consciousness of worth*, or *dignity of mind*, free from presumption above others. There is nothing vicious in this feeling ; on the contrary, it is acknowledged (except by those extravagant ascetics,

who make a sense of degradation essential to Christianity) to be the purest natural source and support of a virtuous conduct\*. How is it, then, that *Pride*, which (if we consider some of its significations, as splendour, dignity) seems, originally, not to have expressed any thing *inordinate*, has been so universally and irrevocably fixed to signify *excess*? I think I can explain this fact. The *self-esteem* of every individual has a natural rival in that of every other. Hence the invidiousness of self-commendation. Every one knows, by constant experience, what a rare combination of circumstances must take place, and with what a delicate hand those circumstances must be managed, in order to make self-commendation endurable. As words are not the only signs of what passes in the mind, the habitual sense of personal *worth* and *respectability* is universally perceived through the whole manner of the person who has it. This perception is quickened by the self-esteem of the observer; and, as the self-esteem of each person may be said to occupy a certain space, it invariably limits that to which others would gladly extend their own. Though this language is, of course, figurative, every one, who has attentively observed mankind will grant that there are individuals who have a most real though inexplicable power of making others shrink into very limited dimensions. Those who possess that power must naturally become objects of a very general dislike. Besides, it seldom happens that two men, being placed in constant juxta-position, do not, in a certain degree, *crowd* each other. Sometimes they find themselves obliged to part company; but more frequently they mould, shape, and *pack* the two *self-esteems*, like travellers in a narrow carriage. But in this process, as well as in that of the illustration, the allotment of space is never equal; and the weak and sensitive will always be compelled to shrink more and more, and fret, secretly, at the bulky and unyielding dimensions of his neighbour.

\* *Self-respect*, a feeling which becomes *honest pride*, when it is insulted, and has to assert its rights against the unfeelingness or injustice of others, is respect for the voice of *Reason*, which every sincere and honest man considers as the voice of God, always ready to speak when reverently consulted within the sanctuary of our CONSCIENCE.

It is, therefore, evident that every *self-esteem* is a *claim*, and sometimes a *power*, over all others; and *claims* (of *powers* we need not speak) however just, especially if they are incessant, are seldom or never acknowledged without a certain degree of displeasure. Add to this natural feeling, which good men subdue, one which, as (in a variable degree) it is perfectly just, no man should endeavour to destroy in himself, or he would lower his character to that of a slave. I speak of a proper watchfulness against the *encroachments*, the *inordinate* claims of other men's self-esteem. There must consequently exist an almost general uneasiness on this subject. Great love, and pure friendship, will certainly remove this state of watchfulness and constant suspicion. But those two blessings are rare. Society proceeds, however, pretty smoothly by the practical good sense which teaches its more refined members (though these are the class whose self-esteem is most sensitive) how to avoid clashing with each other. In fact, *fashionable refinement* may be defined, the art of condensing our self-esteem within ourselves, and shewing it just enough to have it understood that we will not give much more room for the self-esteem of others.

And here we have the answer to the question why *pride*, in its unfavourable sense, has an established verbal sign in all languages, while they want a proper name for the virtuous feeling of which *pride* is an excess. In the daily difficulty of social life above described, in this perpetual jealousy, this unavoidable rivalry, every one stands continually in the character of *judge and party*. Partiality, in judging other men's self-esteem, is, therefore, almost unavoidable; consequently we are very seldom in want of the name of the *virtue*, except to apply it to ourselves, and then we scarcely dare use it. The word therefore which originally, in all languages, had probably a favourable signification, becomes inevitably, in the course of time, a name for the *excess* which every man finds in all others\*.

It must now be evident that all I have said of *pride* must apply to that word when combined with the word *reason*. As

\* The Germans still preserve the word *stolz*, in a favourable sense; though it is frequently used for *Uebermuth*, shewing the general tendency.— See *Krugs Lexikon*, under *Hochmuth*.

that phrase is invariably used to convey reproach, we may proceed in our examination, by substituting for the word *pride* Dr. Johnson's first definition; with such changes only, as grammar absolutely requires in the combination. *Pride of REASON* will, therefore, be *an immoderate esteem of one's own reason*. A man who values his own reason immoderately, or beyond the proper measure, is guilty of *pride of reason*. Our next step in the inquiry must be to find the *proper measure* beyond which we ought not to esteem our reason. Here the analogy of the first definition may guide us. We may justly be charged with excess of *self-esteem* when we invade the proper self-esteem of others. In the same manner, a man is to be blamed for *PRIDE OF REASON*, *when the value he sets upon his own share of that gift induces him to invade the share of another man*. This is an *inordinate* esteem of reason, as he possesses it individually.

I do not see what valid objection can be made to this statement. I am aware that the phrase, *pride of reason*, is not unfrequently employed to express something like a rebellion of reason against God, the supreme Fountain of Reason. But the idea is too absurd to deserve a moment's attention. Any one who could oppose his own reason to the infinite Source of mind and intelligence, would be a madman. Such an intention has never crossed the mind of any man in his senses. Every man knows more or less, as it were, instinctively, that, when he speaks of his own reason, he wishes to express nothing but his perception of one and the same *universal reason*, peculiar to no individual, but supreme over all. This is God\*. The source of the notion

\* *Fénelon, Existence de Dieu*, prem. part. chap. iv, de la *Raison de l'Homme* :—

“A la vérité, ma raison est en moi; car il faut que je rentre sans cesse en moi-même pour la trouver: mais la raison supérieure qui me corrige dans le besoin, et que je consulte, n'est point à moi, et elle ne fait point partie de moi-même. . . . Ainsi, ce qui paraît le plus à nous et être le fond de nous-mêmes, je veux dire notre raison, est ce qui nous est le moins propre et qu'on doit croire le plus emprunté. Nous recevons sans cesse et à tout moment une raison supérieure à nous, comme nous respirons sans cesse l'air qui est un corps étranger, ou comme nous voyons sans cesse tous les objets voisins de nous à la lumière du soleil, dont les rayons sont des corps



which supposes this resistance of the human reason to God, lies in the gross mistake of imagining that any revelation from God can exist for a rational being like man, except through that partial perception of the supreme reason which individuals enjoy in various degrees. This is what we call *our* reason. Among that class of Christians who accuse others of deliberately opposing their own reason to the revelations of God, there cannot be one who has ever considered that, when he himself receives any thing as revealed in Scripture, he is only following the dictates of his *reason*. He may believe (as is not unfrequently the case) the greatest absurdities; he may embrace what, upon any other subject, he would reject as a palpable contradiction: nevertheless, he does all this because he finds some *more general reason* for sacrificing his reason on these particulars. He grounds that more general reason on God, the eternal source of reason; and he does well. But he should, at the same time, perceive that he is not sacrificing his own reason to God,—a sacrifice which to the supreme reason would be abominable,—but an inferior and partial judgment of his own reason for the sake of another which appears to him more sound and comprehensive. Exactly the same is the case of every *sincere* man who rejects what others embrace as God's word. He does not deny that *word*; he only denies either the testimony or the judgment of other men. It cannot, indeed, be conceived, that any man in his sound mind, believing that any, even the most incomprehensible mystery, has been actually communicated by God to man, nevertheless refuses to acknowledge it, accusing God either of error or falsehood. This is impossible. To believe in God, and at the same time to make his reason inferior to human reason, is a contradiction which cannot lay hold on our mind. Human reason has never opposed the divine and supreme reason, know-

étrangers a nos yeux.... Il y a une école intérieure ou l'homme reçoit ce qu'il ne peut ni se donner ni attendre des autres hommes qui vivent d'emprunt comme lui... Où est-elle cette raison parfaite qui est si près de moi et si différente de moi?... Où est-elle cette raison suprême? N'est elle pas le Dieu que je cherche?"—*Quoted by Cousin*, ubi sup. p. 479, note. Independently of controversy, I am persuaded that λόγος, in the first chapter of St. John's Gospel, is the *Supreme Reason* personified by a figure of speech.

ing that it did so: it is only the human will, that, in spite of reason, has the power, and, indeed, a very decided propensity, to oppose the will of God. No man who understands what he says, will talk of reason's rebellion against God.—But let us return to our subject.

Having found that *pride of reason* is an aggression upon other men's reason, arising from an over-estimate of the worth of the aggressor's own, we may now proceed in our inquiry, Who are justly chargeable with pride of reason? Is it those who, having examined the Scriptures, propose their own collective sense of those books to the acceptance of others, but blame them not for rejecting it? or those who positively assert, that their own sense of the Scriptures is the only one which an honest man, not under diabolical delusion, can find there? The answer is so plain, that a child, who could understand the terms of the question, might give it. And, yet, experience has taught me that there is no chance of unravelling the confused ideas which prevent many a well-meaning Christian from perceiving that the charge of pride of reason falls upon the Orthodox. Their own *sense* of the Scripture (such is the dizzy whirl which their excited feelings produce) must be the *word of God*, because THEY cannot find another. *My sense* of the Scripture (for instance) must, on the contrary, be a damnable error, because it is the work of my *reason*, which opposes the Word of God, *i. e.* THEIR sense of the Scriptures: hence the conclusion that I am guilty of *pride of reason*. “Renounce that *pride* (they say), and you will see in the Scriptures what we propose to you:” which is to say, *surrender your reason to ours, and you will agree with us.*

I have already, incidentally, illustrated the theological notion of *pride of reason* by what (if the same interests, internal and external, which occasion this clamour against reason were involved) would certainly have been called the *pride of sight*. Allow me to dwell, once more, on the nature of that very considerable *vice*. *Pride of sight* would be defined, an *inordinate value set on the individual's power of vision*. The most approved and meritorious method to avoid this criminal excess would be to put out one's eyes. The person who had performed this noble act of

self-denial should be entitled to declare, uncontradicted, that he never before had seen so well. He should, in consequence of the superiority of this new sight, be chosen leader of other men who still kept those delusive organs, *the eyes*\*. The sacrifice of the eyes would be offered up as a testimony of reverence to the Creator of Light, as that of reason is now considered an appropriate tribute to the Fountain of it. Of two men who looked, apparently with the same intensity, at a remote and indistinct object, *he* who asserted that he saw even the minutest parts, and denied the possibility that any good and honest person could differ from himself in the description, should be declared *thereby* to possess the virtue of *humbleness of sight*: he, on the contrary, who confessed that his eyes could not discover what the other man said he saw, but granted that he might be allowed to enjoy his view without blame, should be charged with *pride of sight* in a most offensive degree. Though both were exerting their power of vision under the light of the same sun, and had their eyes equally open, the latter should be accused of despising and hating the light of heaven, and be strongly suspected of *winking*: if this could not be proved externally, it should be firmly believed that he had an internal power of paralyzing his optic nerve, and making himself stone-blind. The happy observer of such parts of the remote object, as he, in the same breath, declared to be *invisible*†, should earnestly call upon the other, as if he would save him from death and infamy, to renounce his *pride of sight*, and agree to *see* the same things which he (the adviser) had, in his great *humility of vision*, firmly determined to discover. Such should be the moral law of the PRIDE OF SIGHT.

I confess to you, my dear friend, that, when combating such pitiable delusions as occur at every step in theological controversy, I have often felt a despondency, which tempted me to throw away the pen, never to employ it again upon such sub-

\* Il est vrai que de notre temps une personne de la plus grande élévation disait, qu'en articles de foi, il fallait se crever les yeux pour voir clair.—*Leibnitz, Nouveaux Essais, quoted by Victor Cousin.*

† Thus the Deity is declared to be *incomprehensible* in the minutest description of his *mode of being* that ever was attempted in human language.

jects. Nothing, indeed, but my deep felt conviction of the enormous evils which intolerance, in this its last disguise, is producing in the world, has supported my determination to oppose it to my last breath. Among the hopeless cases of that fever of religious feeling which creates a lamentable confusion of thought upon these subjects, there may be patients who possess natural candour and intellectual strength sufficient to extricate them, I do not say from the *doctrines* of Orthodoxy,—for that is to me a minor point,—but from the mischievous error of taking their own *sense* of Scripture for the word of God itself; and from the *essentially intolerant* belief, that any man who opposes that sense, is betrayed by his *pride of reason* into rebellion against God.

Will any candid and reasonable man deny that *articles of religion*, or creeds, are only explanations of Scripture?—I ask, then, are these *explanations* the work of *reason*, or the result of *inspiration*?—My question is addressed exclusively to Protestants;—for it is *their* inconsistent and contradictory intolerance which I am opposing. That of the Roman Catholics must be opposed by disproving the inspiration of their authoritative expounder—whether the church, or the Pope, or both. But the Protestants have no alternative: either they must admit that the exposition of the Scriptures, given in their respective creeds, is a work of reason, or they must embrace the Popish principle of infallibility. That kind of unauthoritative tradition to which some Protestant writers have fondly clung\*, especially in the Church of England, makes not the least difference. To ascertain that tradition, is a work of reason assisted by learning; and the most successful search of the views and opinions of ancient days in some churches, can give to the result no higher character than that of a very questionable historical probability. But if, in the formation of all creeds whatever, the reason of the framers, as employed in finding the *sense* of Scripture, is the ultimate support, the real foundation upon which their articles stand; what instance of *pride of reason* can be more glaring than that of attributing some kind of guilt to the rejection of that purely human commentary on the Bible? Whether few or many

\* See a *Discourse on Unauthoritative Tradition*; a very able work of Dr. Hawkins, Provost of Oriel College, Oxford.

men combined for the purpose of passing the work of their reason for the only true sense of the Scripture,—thus encroaching upon the rights of other men's reason,—can make no difference, unless it be that of aggravating their guilt. If many combine to do an unjust and illegal act, they are guilty, not only of the individual wrong committed, but add to it that of conspiracy. Let all the bishops and priests in the world unite, to awe other men's reason into submission to the inferences which the *council* (as such assemblies have been called) suppose they have drawn from the Scripture; their multitude only shews that the *pride of THEIR reason* is attended by a consciousness of its *weakness*. *Reason* does not derive strength from crowds. The reason of the most obscure individual, be it but true *reason*, is sufficient to subdue the world, if fairly left to take its course.

It is remarkable that Christians are accused of *pride of reason* in proportion as their view of Christianity contains fewer *doctrines of inference* than that of the accusers. Compare the Creed of the Trinitarian with that of the Unitarian. The former may be true, and the latter erroneous, though I adhere to the latter; but, unquestionably, the *Trinitarian Creed* is nearly made up of *inferences*—it is almost entirely a work of *reason*, though, in my opinion, sadly misapplied. Why, then, is the *Unitarian* accused of *pride of reason*, when he only employs it to shew that the Trinitarian has not any *sound reason* to draw those inferences? Which of the two is guilty of encroaching upon another man's *rights of reason*? Is it not he who claims for his inferences—the work of his own *reason*—an authority above human *reason*?

It is not, however, to *inferences* alone (the work of logical reason) that the Trinitarian creed owes its existence, and, more than its existence, its popularity. My observation has shewn me, and that of every competent judge will find, that the strongest hold which that creed has on the minds of its supporters, consists in *preconceived theories* concerning the nature of God and of sin, and of some *necessity* which places the Divine Nature in a state of difficulty in regard to the pardon of sin. The work of saving the race of man from a most horrible fate depends (according to this theory) not only on a very mysterious method of overcoming the difficulty which prevents pardon by an act

of mercy, on repentance, but also on the acknowledgment of the *mystery* by the sinner. The remedy prepared by the wisdom of God is (according to this theory) totally powerless, unless we believe a certain explanation of the *manner* in which it acts. Now, people who cordially embrace this view very naturally work themselves into a state of the most agonizing excitement : for if the whole world is to perish, because it does not know how the saving remedy acts, or because its activity is explained in a wrong way, benevolent men, who think themselves in possession of that important secret, must burn with zeal to spread it, and with indignation against those who propagate an explanation which deprives the remedy of all its power. "Believing," says an *orthodox* writer\*, though a dissenter from the *Orthodoxy* of the Church of England, "the doctrine (of the divinity of Christ) to comprehend within itself the hopes of a guilty and perishing world, while I would contend *meekly*, I must be pardoned if, at the same time, I contend earnestly." It is this preconceived theory (one of the strangest that was ever founded on reasonings *à priori*) that guides most Christians in the exposition of the New Testament, and even in that of many passages of the Hebrew Scriptures. The notion that sin *could not* be pardoned unless a person *equal to God* suffered for it, is the deeply-coloured glass through which the orthodox read the Scriptures. I do not *blame* them for this extraordinary conception. What I earnestly wish is, that their religious fears may allow them to perceive that this theory of redemption is made up of *preconceived notions and inferences*. Even if that theory were true, it would be unquestionably a work of *reason* working by inference. Can, then, the attempt to make it the very soul of the Gospel be acquitted of the charge which is constantly in the mouth of the orthodox? Are they not guilty of the *pride of reason*?

But here the *orthodox* (I mean the man who considers all that dissent from him *necessarily* in error) escapes again into the mist of ideas, which hovers always at hand in the field of theological controversy. That the multitude will follow him into the darkness is natural and certain. Reluctance to believe what

\* Mr. Wardlaw, quoted by the Rev. Mr. Yates in his *Vindication of Unitarianism*, p. 41, *American edit.*

is directly against the first principles of reason, appears to the mass of unthinking Christians as intellectual pride. Readiness to believe what cannot even be propounded in uncontradictory words, is the purest faith. Considering this popular feeling, if two views of Christianity, the Athanasian and the Unitarian, are brought before that mass of Christians who have been assiduously taught, that the efficacy of faith (as it is vulgarly supposed of medicines) is proved by the offensiveness of what is to be believed, nobody can doubt to which they will give the preference. The Unitarian creed will be rejected, upon the ground that it raises no dislike or reluctance: the other will be embraced, because it produces the expected effect of faith. *Credo quia impossibile*. The plain Christian, who entertains these notions (and those who are educated according to the orthodox system entertain them in proportion to their want of intellectual activity), cannot fail to discover the clearest proofs of *pride of reason* in a view of Christianity which does not bewilder him; for "if it were not the work of that *pride* (he will say), how could it be so agreeable to *reason*—so *reasonable*?"

I would, however, earnestly recommend to persons of this description to examine whether, in point of *reasonableness*, the New Testament (take it all in all) is not more in agreement with *reason*, with the plain Unitarian statement, than with the complicated creeds of the orthodox churches? I do not speak of three or four texts (excluding the evident *interpolations*, which, curiously enough, are *all on the Trinitarian side*); for those texts, owing to our early imbibed notions, create at first sight some perplexity: I speak of the tone of instruction which prevails in those writings. Let the impartial inquirer observe the absence of all metaphysical speculation in the Gospels, and compare it with the abundance of scholastic philosophy in the orthodox confessions. Let him remark that the New Testament presupposes no previous knowledge in the persons whom the authors addressed; for those holy men well knew that they were sent principally to preach the Gospel to the poor and uneducated. On the other hand, let him reflect on the mass of strange ideas which are necessary as a *preparation*, in order to understand

the mere statements of the Athanasian Creed, the Confession of Augsburg, or the Thirty-nine Articles: in a word, the whole of the patristico-scholastic theology which is taught in this country. Allow me to make a brief enumeration of the previous notions which, if the New Testament were intended to convey the orthodox system of divinity, it would necessarily presume to exist in every person to whom it is addressed by Providence. Under the name of *Orthodox* I embrace both Arminians and Calvinists, because both are allowed admission into the Church of England; and the latter claim the privilege of Orthodoxy, I believe *exclusively*, in the Kirk of Scotland.

To be prepared for the established and orthodox sense of the New Testament, young minds must be accustomed to form to themselves the idea of a Creator—God the Father; an infinitely powerful being, whose prominent attribute is severity: who created mankind, according to some divines, *knowing*, according to others *predetermining*, that by far the greater part of all the future generations of men should, after a short mortal life, be eternally alive in torments. The opening mind must also be accustomed to consider it reasonable and just, that, *because* the first parent of mankind disobeyed a precept of God concerning a certain fruit which he was not to taste, all his descendants to the remotest posterity should not only suffer diseases and death, but be born also *guilty* of *sin*, objects of *wrath* to God, morally degraded, and very far or totally removed from rectitude. Another elementary notion, not unlike this, must be instilled into the young mind, in respect to divine equity. The child must learn that since by Adam's sin all his posterity were doomed to spiritual *death* (which he must understand in the sense of *eternal life in misery*), God the Father could not consistently with his *justice* pardon them, unless some one suffered in their stead. He, therefore, doomed his only begotten son, a perfectly innocent being, equal to himself, to death. The child might be inclined to expect that as Adam's sin involved all mankind in ruin, independently of their will, this remedy by its intrinsic power would also save ALL MEN, and finally lead them to happiness. But he must be checked in this bold use of his reason, and taught to



believe that the infinite remedy, prepared by God, falls widely short of the extent of the evil produced by man's original disobedience.

Another previous notion of great importance, if the child is to find the orthodox system in the New Testament, is that of an *unity*, which is not *unity*: for he will certainly read repeated assertions in the Bible that God is *ONE*; yet by *one* he must understand *three* infinite minds, all equally God, and nevertheless not making up *three* Gods. To proceed: the understanding has original and indestructible laws which begin to direct it at a very early age, especially if called into activity by instruction. A quick child, though not acquainted with logic, will very soon be practically aware of one of the first principles of thought; *that*, namely, which rejects the assertion that one thing, *substantially* conceived, is another thing conceived in the same manner. He will perceive the absurdity of saying that *Edward is John*, or the *horse is the cow*\*. As the young pupil must be prepared to infer from the New Testament that a *perfect man* is *perfect God*, he must be carefully instructed to discard the mental principle which would represent this as a contradiction, of the same kind as it would be to say that there may be a triangle which is also a circle; perfect gold which is perfect silver; a perfect horse which is a perfect eagle, &c. &c.: or (which is commonly the case) must be imperceptibly led to consider the word God as expressing a quality, or an aggregate of qualities, which may be predicated of more than one, as the name of a species; just as we say John is Man, Peter is Man, Andrew is Man. This latter notion is a necessary result of placing the mind between the two *logically* contradictory assertions, there is but *one* God, and there are *three* who are God. And so it is that, with the exception of a few who in this country are still acquainted with that ingeniously perverse system of words by means of which the truly *scholastic* Trinitarians (such as Bishop Bull, and Waterland, who had accurately studied the fathers and the schoolmen) *appear* to evade the logical contradictions with which the doctrine of the Trinity abounds—all, as I have

\* *Res de Re prædicari non potest*: Abelard's celebrated principle, by which he confuted the Realists.

observed for many years, take the word *God*, in regard to Christ, as the name of a species, and more frequently of a dignity. This appears in the method, very frequently used, to prove the divinity of Christ, by a collection of passages in which (as the writers imagine) all the attributes of deity are predicated of him. The whole, indeed, of their language implies something *conferred* upon the human nature of Christ; and, so far, they are proceeding on a truly scriptural principle; for Christ himself has declared that every thing he possesses has been *given* to him. Thus these very pious but not very logical men establish quite the opposite of what they intend to prove. Deity *communicated*, is a contradictory idea to that of *proper Deity*. Many indeed among the Trinitarians, if they understood themselves, would perceive that they only differ in *language* from the Unitarians; for I am convinced that there is not one of this denomination who would not give to Christ the name of *God*, in the sense of the *highest dignity* ever conferred upon an individual of the human species, if the example of Christ himself did not teach them that there is a danger in such a stretch of language, and that it has a tendency directly opposed to the important belief in the divine *Unity*. It is worthy of attention, that, when Jesus was about to be stoned for having used language which the Jews took to mean *equality* with God, though he asserted that the application, in an improper sense, of the name *God* to men was not *blasphemy*, he still would not claim it for himself, but used the denomination, *Son of God*, in the Jewish sense of Messiah, the anointed or sanctified of God\*.

It is not to be expected, however, that in the process of

\* See John x, 29-36. It has been observed by one of the most powerful writers in the English language (Archbishop Whately), in answer to those who assert that when our Saviour said to Pilate "My kingdom is not of this world," he only alluded to the then present state of his kingdom; that such a view attributes to Christ a most unworthy mental reservation. Apply the same remark to Christ's answer to the Jews; and if He knew that he was *God*, and intended that such a belief should, at a future time, be made a fundamental doctrine of his religion, his answer would be such an evasion, as every man who loves and reveres Jesus of Nazareth, would not, on any account, attribute to him.

instilling the necessary previous notions which the New Testament would require in order to convey the orthodox sense, this *collateral* mistake of supposing that the idea of God can be attributed to another being, as a conferred dignity, should be carefully opposed. The assistance of that notion in keeping up the popularity of Trinitarianism is too evident not to be *instinctively* treated with lenity, even by the very few who in this country are aware of its theological inaccuracy. The body of orthodox Christians are entirely supported in their profession of the Divinity of Christ by the feeling that, to deny it, is to *degrade* the Saviour. To deprive of his *Deity* the most amiable as well as most venerable person ever known to the world, appears in the light of the greatest ingratitude. It is this feeling that erases from the mind whatever impression the voice of *Reason*, instructed by the Scriptures, may have made in favour of that supreme religious truth, the Unity of God\*. The *Father* (let every one ask his own consciousness as well as his observation), the *Father* among us is not an object of *affection*: in regard to his incommunicable honour, the mass of Christians have no quick or delicate feeling. And is it possible to avoid this direct result of the descriptions which divines give of the Supreme God? Is He not represented as ready to destroy the world—as a *consuming fire*, that would readily devour us, if it had not spent its wrath upon the Son†? —The consequence of this teaching is visible everywhere: the SON is preferred to the Father; to that Father,

\* In the interminable confusion of primitive ideas and language upon which the common acceptance of the Trinitarian doctrine reposes, people do not perceive a most simple, and, in itself, obvious truth, which might allay this fear of *degrading* our Saviour. If Christ be *God*, he must be that *one* God for whose exclusive honour the Unitarian contends. Christ, in that case, can neither be degraded nor offended. But if he be *not* God, the danger of offending both the Father and Him, is one which a pious mind should not overlook.

† “ Have you informed him (said an anxious divine to the mother of a dying boy) that God, without Christ, is a consuming, devouring fire?”—Upon the acceptance of this view by the child, depended his salvation, according to this Christian instructor. To what kind of heads and tempers will Christianity be confined, in the course of a few generations, if it have such men for its publishers and ministers? I relate the above fact upon unquestionable authority. It took place in Dublin, not long ago.

whom Christ worshipped and loved; to that Father for whose glory he lived and died; to that Father, to do whose will was his meat and drink. Yet Christians are now satisfied that the most certain way to secure the salvation proclaimed by Christ is to neglect "God our Saviour," and place his Son, not at God's "right hand," but occupying God's throne. A single step in the same course of feeling, assisted externally by circumstances, may land a child thus instructed upon the notion of a still milder and more accessible sort of deity—the *Virgin Mother of God*: so strong is the tendency of mankind to worship gods like unto themselves.

I believe I have omitted many of the notions which regularly prepare the minds of every rising generation, that they may not be struck with the difference between the simplicity of the New Testament and the abstruse and fanciful philosophy of the established theological systems. But what I have laid before you is more than sufficient to shew that the *rashness* (if not the *pride*) of Reason is all on the side of the Orthodox. We are, nevertheless, assured with the greatest confidence, that the entire system, of which I have given you a few specimens, is so plainly contained in the New Testament, that *he that runs may read it*.

It has cost me no small trouble to avoid, in what I have been writing, even the most slight appearance of satire; yet such is the nature of every thing which contradicts the first principles of *Reason*, that, if you divest it of the mysterious language in which the mind has been accustomed to revere it, no care whatever can prevent the revulsion of feeling which the naked absurdity will produce. It is exactly like what I have seen, in Spain, in regard to the most revered objects. The *miraculous* image of the Virgin Mary, for whose honour the kings of Spain maintain, at the expense of the country, a body of dignified clergy, has its splendid dress changed, once a year, *behind a large thick veil*; because even the blindest enthusiasts are aware, that if the wooden frame covered with canvass, which lies underneath the gems and brocade, were to be seen, public adoration might in a short time end in general laughter.

But, as it is the invariable custom of idol-guardians to interpret every thing said of the *idol* as if it were intended against the

object which (though perhaps sacred in itself) it misrepresents and distorts, so we see the framers and supporters of fanciful *inferences* from the Scriptures constantly identifying those *inferences*, not only with the Scriptures, but with God himself. If any one treats the *contradictions* of the Athanasian Creed as he would any others expressed in language (for *contradictions* cannot exist except *in language*), he is directly accused of impiety. He is told that he is treating the most sacred things irreverently; as if the observations applied to the objects, and not to the language which misrepresents those objects. It is in this manner that a Roman Catholic multitude would say that you were laughing at Mary, the mother of Jesus, if they observed you casting a look of disgust and pity at the clumsy wooden frame, with varnished head and hands, before which the attendant priests are obliged to kneel, holding lighted wax candles. In like manner, the metaphysical *inferences* which the *Reason* of the Orthodox has (as they imagine) collected from the Bible, are most positively identified with the WORD OF GOD. How, then, can we be surprised at the readiness with which the unthinking multitudes of all ranks seize the notion that the *Unitarians* set up their *Reason* above the word of God, and, by the most guilty and impious intellectual pride, refuse their assent to all divine MYSTERIES?

Admirably as this subject of *Mystery* has been treated by some enlightened and truly philosophical divines\*, I cannot help thinking that there is still a very essential mistake to be removed concerning it. "There are mysteries in every thing around us," is constantly and emphatically repeated. But I do not remember to have seen it observed any where, that the application of this fact, as an antecedent reason for believing in the mysteries of Orthodox Divinity, is a fallacy. In respect to the demanded submission, there is no similarity between the *mysteries* which surround us in nature, and those concerning which the Christian world has been in agitation for about eighteen centuries. The mysteries of nature stand before us, a matter of indubitable experience. We see all bodies drawn towards the centre of the earth; and the *fact* forces itself upon the credence of every individual, though we are in the

\* See, especially, *Yates's Vindication of Unitarianism*, c. IV, part I.

dark as to the *cause* of gravitation. We see the effects of electricity and galvanism, though we are unable to trace those effects higher up in the chain of causes and effects. The cause, in all such cases, is *mysterious*; but the *facts* are so permanent, that we can reduce them to general laws. But, in the name of common sense, I ask, do the mysteries of the Trinity and Original Sin stand before us in the same manner? Do they even stand (as they easily might) in *express terms* in the Scriptures? When a *fact* which may be verified as often as we please presents itself in nature, *Reason* is never tempted to raise the least objection. The mind wonders, but, far from resisting the evidence, rejoices in the contemplation of the object. *Reason* (it is true) begins a search in order to explain the mystery by means of some more general agency, already known; but if it fails to find it, it does not deny the fact which it cannot explain. But how can men of no common talents allow themselves so to be led away by the vulgar error of divines, as to make the submission of reason to the mysterious *facts* of experience a ground to demand a similar submission to *mysteries* which arise from certain *explanations* of language? Does the supposed mystery stand before us as a *fact*, as one of the mysteries of visible nature? By no means. Our whole theological *fact* is reduced to the presence of certain arbitrary marks, or characters, representing vocal sounds, which, in their turn, were used in a language now dead, to represent objects for the *most part* material, and *universally* within man's knowledge, which are now supposed to express *figuratively*, something spiritual, and quite beyond the knowledge and comprehension of man. Upon this *fact* alone the orthodox divines build their contradictory statements; and when they have raised their mighty structure of words which destroy each other's sense, they tell us that it is a *mystery*; and that, as we believe the mysteries of Nature, so must we surrender our understanding to the mysteries of their own creation. How can any man of sense be entangled in such a miserable fallacy? The existence of the pretended mysteries is the very question which divides the Christian world. Our observation cannot go beyond the words which some divines declare to assert the existence of the mystery. Renounce the

*human exposition* from which the mystery arises, and it totally disappears. Does any thing like this happen with the *mysteries of nature*? The mysteries of the divine essence are not, cannot be, before our eyes: they are not, cannot be, even *verbally* in the Scriptures; for words are not able to express any thing above the ideas of the human mind. What we find in the Scriptures are expressions couched in the *language of men*; consequently we must expect that they be *significant*. But divines contend that they *signify what men cannot understand*. They go farther, and, in *contradictory* language, they tell you that they have laid before you what the Scripture contains; and when you answer that *contradictory language* is no language at all, they accuse you of *Pride of Reason*. In a word, *they themselves* make the mysteries, and then want you to submit, as if those mysteries stood before you in the character of independent and unquestionable facts.

I cannot too earnestly beg your constant attention to the great difference between mysteries *to be explained* and mysteries *to be proved*. Reason submits to the former, because the existence of the mysterious fact is unquestionable; but when called upon to submit to the latter, because forsooth they also are *mysteries*, it turns away in disgust. The mysteries to which the reason of the Unitarian objects are not mysteries *proved*, are not even mysteries positively stated in divinely authorized language, but mysteries *conjectured* to lie concealed in that language: they are not unfrequently *verbal contradictions*, which no rational language can be supposed to contain. If God, through his accredited messengers, had said, “the language in which I am to address you about myself is, when tried by the invariable laws of the mind, contradictory to itself, yet I command you to repeat it, and say that you believe the mysteries it envelops;”—if such a command could be *satisfactorily* proved, reason would have no right to refuse it; but when the Gospel is addressed to us in that same language by means of which we understand each other, we may well conceive that it was intended to be understood: when it is called a *Revelation*, we must expect to find it really a *disclosure*; something that will convey a clear sense to our minds; not downright contradictions—not *mysterious words*, which, like the ABRACA-

DABBA of the Gnostics, is to save us from evil by the sound and shape of its letters.

The position of the Orthodox Protestants, who, having renounced only fragments of popery, cherish its main root in their hearts, is, to me, exceedingly curious, though lamentable. What an awkward defence against Transubstantiation must a Trinitarian make who accuses the Unitarian of *Pride of Reason*, because he will not admit that the Athanasian Creed is *virtually* contained in the New Testament! I can imagine the cry of triumph which would be raised if a few manuscripts, of high antiquity, were to be discovered in some corner of the east containing the passage on the *three heavenly witnesses*. And yet such testimony could not be compared, either in point of unanimity or positive assertion, with the words, *This is my body—This is my blood*. I do not believe either *transubstantiation* or the *real presence*; but, wishing to be just and impartial, I must declare that the Protestant clamours against the *Pride of Reason*, place the opponents of those Catholic doctrines completely in the power of their adversaries. Let us imagine a short dialogue.

CATHOLIC.—Why do you not believe what Christ declares in the most positive and clear words?

PROTESTANT.—Because the expressions, taken in a literal sense, are absurd.

CATHOLIC.—Are they more absurd than the proposition, *Three is One, and One is Three*? a proposition which you (agreeing with us) consider as the very foundation of the “Catholic Verity;” though nothing like those words is found in the genuine portions of the New Testament?—Do you not consider, besides, that the word *absurd* does not properly apply to physical facts? That one substance be changed into another, implies no *absurdity*; but that *three* distinct persons, *each of whom is God, should be one God*, is certainly ABSURD TO US.

PROTESTANT.—Transubstantiation, certainly, does not sound so absurd as the statement of the Trinity; but then, on the other hand, we have the testimony of our senses against it.

CATHOLIC.—The senses, my friend, have nothing to do in the present case, for the *substantial qualities* of bread and wine remain



working upon the senses: the substance alone is changed. Surely, you do not object to this kind of philosophy, for it is just that which saves us from contradictions in the statement of the Trinity.

PROTESTANT.—But can you suppose that Christ, addressing plain men, who never had dreamt of such philosophy, would so depend upon its influence, as to expect that, without any further explanation, they would understand that the bread and wine had been changed into his own body and blood?

CATHOLIC.—Do you not, in the same manner, believe that, although there is no direct assertion, no words about Trinity in Unity, which can be compared to *This is my Body, This is my Blood*, Christ left it to be inferred from scattered passages, by the assistance of philosophical speculations about Nature, Substance, Persons, *Mutual-in-being\**, &c. &c.?

PROTESTANT.—My reason submits in the one case, and resists in the other.

CATHOLIC.—Are you not guilty of pride—the PRIDE OF REASON? Do you not reject the clearest declaration that language can be conceived to make, because it offends your PRIDE?

But I must conclude this Letter, and, with it, the subject. The whole system of theology contained in the Articles of the various Protestant Churches is purely a work of *Reason*, though, unfortunately, misemployed. Those Articles are *Logical Inferences*; and *Inferences* are, unquestionably, the work of Reason. Even the *theory* of the verbal inspiration of the writings from which such inferences are supposed to be drawn could not, if granted, raise the *inferential work* above its human character, or warrant it against error. This being a proposition which no candid and intelligent man will deny, I will leave you to judge between those who doom to eternal perdition every one who denies the accuracy of those inferences; and those who, with my humble self, contend that eternal happiness cannot depend on the right choice of such *opinions*. Which of these two classes is justly charged with PRIDE OF REASON? If you still doubt, read,

\* I do not know a better way of translating that important word *Circumincissio*, or *going round into one another*, which is of so great importance in every *Treatise on the Trinity*.

I request, any of the numerous works of *Orthodox* Divines, Churchmen and Dissenters, and settle with yourself to whom Dr. Johnson's definition does properly apply. Remember that the second signification of PRIDE is, "Insolence, rude treatment of others, insolent exultation."—If, however, you have none of those works at hand, wait a short time; and the *Orthodox* Reviews of these Letters will perfectly answer the purpose.

## APPENDICES AND NOTES.

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### APPENDIX I.

*A few Extracts from PROFESSOR NORTON'S STATEMENT OF REASONS FOR NOT BELIEVING THE DOCTRINES OF TRINITARIANS, &c. &c., mentioned in the Preface of the present Work\*.*

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PROFESSOR NORTON, after mentioning that, in 1819, he had published a Tract, to which he had given the title which is now prefixed to the work from which the following Extracts are taken, proceeds to say:—

“I have said, ‘I resumed the task;’ and the expression is appropriate; for the discussion is one in which no scholar or intellectual man can, at the present day, engage with alacrity. To the great body of enlightened individuals in all countries, to the generality of those, who, on every subject but theology, are the guides of public opinion, it would be as incongruous to address an argument against the Trinity as an argument against transubstantiation, or the imputation of Adam’s sin, or the supremacy of the Pope, or the divine right of kings. These doctrines, once subjects of fierce contention, are all, in their

\* The work of Professor Norton being still scarce in this country, I gladly avail myself of this opportunity of giving a few specimens, taken somewhat in connexion with a few of the topics in the preceding little work; and of expressing my very high sense of the ability and learning displayed in that (according to my judgment) perfectly triumphant refutation of the established or orthodox Doctrines on the Nature of God and the Person of Christ.

view, equally obsolete. To disprove the Trinity will appear to many of whom I speak a labour as idle and unprofitable as the confutation of any other of those antiquated errors; and to engage in the task may seem to imply a theologian's ignorance of the opinions of the world, and the preposterous and untimely zeal of a recluse student, believing that the dogmas of his books still rule the minds of men. It would be difficult to find a recognition of the existence of this doctrine in any work of the present day of established reputation, not professedly theological. All mention of it is, by common consent, excluded from the departments of polite literature, moral science, and natural religion; and from discussions, written or oral, not purely sectarian, intended to affect men's belief or conduct. Should an allusion to it occur in any such production, it would be regarded as a trait of fanaticism, or as discovering a mere secular respect for some particular church. It is scarcely adverted to, except in works professedly theological; and theology, the noblest and most important branch of philosophy, has been brought into disrepute, so far, at least, as it treats of the doctrines of revealed religion, by a multitude of writers, who have seized upon this branch of it as their peculiar province, and who have been any thing but philosophers.

“Why, then, argue against a doctrine which, among intelligent men, has fallen into neglect and disbelief? I answer, that the neglect and disbelief of this doctrine, and of other doctrines of like character, has extended to Christianity itself. It is from the public professions of nations calling themselves Christian, from the established creeds and liturgies of different churches or sects, and from the writings of those who have been reputed orthodox in their day, that most men derive their notions of Christianity. But the treaties of European nations still begin with a solemn appeal to the ‘Most Holy Trinity;’ the doctrine is still the professed faith of every established church, and, as far as I know, of every sect which makes a creed its bond of communion: and if any one should recur to books, he would find it presented as an all-important distinction of Christianity by far the larger portion of divines. It is, in consequence, viewed by most men, more or less distinctly, as a

part of Christianity. In connexion with other doctrines, as false and more pernicious, it has been moulded into systems of religious belief, which have been publicly and solemnly substituted in the place of true religion. These systems have counteracted the whole evidence of divine revelation. The proof of the most important fact in the history of mankind, that the truths of religion have not been left to be doubtfully and dimly discerned, but have been made known to us by God himself, has been overborne and rendered ineffectual by the nature of the doctrines ascribed to God. Hence it is, that, in many parts of Europe, scarcely an intelligent and well-informed Christian is left. It has seemed as idle to inquire into the evidences of those systems which passed under the name of Christianity, as into the proof of the incarnations of Vishnu, or the divine mission of Mahomet. Nothing of the true character of our religion, nothing attesting its descent from heaven, was to be discovered amid the corruptions of the prevailing faith. On the contrary, they were so marked with falsehood and fraud, they so clearly discovered the baseness of their earthy origin, that, when imposed upon men as the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, those who regarded them as such were fairly relieved from the necessity of inquiring whether they had been taught by God. The internal evidence of Christianity was annihilated; and all other evidence is wasted when applied to prove that such doctrines have been revealed from heaven.”—*Preface*, pp. i-vii.

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——— “The doctrine (of the proper divinity of Christ) is proved to be false, because *it is evident from the Scriptures that none of those effects were produced which would necessarily have resulted from its first annunciation by Christ, and its subsequent communication by his Apostles.* The disciples of our Saviour must, at some period, have considered him merely as a man. Before he commenced his ministry, his relations, and fellow-townsmen, certainly regarded him as nothing more than a man. ‘Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joseph, and of Judas and Simon? And are not

his sisters here with us\*?' At some particular period, the communication must have been made by our Saviour to his disciples, that he was not a mere man, but that he was, properly speaking, and in the highest sense, God himself. The doctrines with which we are contending, and other doctrines of a similar character, have so obscured and confused the whole of Christianity, that even its historical facts appear to be regarded by many scarcely in the light of real occurrences. But we *may* carry ourselves back in imagination to the time when Christ was on earth, and place ourselves in the situation of the first believers. Let us reflect, for a moment, on what would be the state of our feelings, if some one with whom we had associated as a man, were to declare to us that he was really God himself. If his character and works had been such as to command any attention to such an assertion, still through what an agony of incredulity, and doubt, and amazement, and consternation, must the mind pass, before it could settle down into a conviction of the truth of his declaration! And when convinced of its truth, with what unspeakable astonishment should we be overwhelmed! With what extreme awe, and entire prostration of every faculty, should we approach and contemplate such a being; if indeed man, in his present tenement of clay, could endure such intercourse with his Maker! With what a strong and unrelaxing grasp would the idea seize upon our minds! How continually would it be expressed in the most forcible language, whenever we had occasion to speak of him! What a deep and indelible colouring would it give to every thought and sentiment in the remotest degree connected with an agent so mysterious and so awful! But we perceive nothing of this state of mind in the disciples of our Saviour, but much that gives evidence of a very different state of mind. One may read over the first three Evangelists; and it must be by a more than ordinary exercise of ingenuity if he discover what may pass for an argument, that either the writers, or the numerous individuals of whom they speak, re-

\* Mark vi, 3.—“I have retained the words ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters,’ used in the common version, not thinking it important, in the connexion in which the passage is quoted, to make any change in this rendering; but the relationship intended, I believe, to be that of cousins”

garded our Saviour as their Maker and God, or that he ever assumed that character.....Throughout the New Testament we find nothing which implies that such a most extraordinary change of feeling ever took place in the disciples of Christ as must have been produced by the communication that their Master was God himself upon earth. Nowhere do we find the expression of those irresistible and absorbing sentiments which must have possessed their minds under the conviction of this fact. With this conviction, in what terms, for instance, would they have spoken of his crucifixion, and of the circumstances with which it was attended? The power of language would have sunk under them in the attempt to express their feelings: their words, when they approached the subject, would have been little more than a thrilling cry of horror and indignation. On this subject they did, indeed, feel most deeply; but can we think that St. Peter regarded his Master as God incarnate, when he thus addressed the Jews by whom Christ had just been crucified? ‘Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, proved to you TO BE A MAN FROM GOD, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves know, him, delivered up to you in conformity to the fixed will and foreknowledge of God, ye have crucified and slain by the hands of the heathen. Him has God raised to life.’—*Acts* ii, 22-24.

“But what has been stated are not the only consequences which must have followed from the communication of the doctrine in question. It cannot be denied by those who hold the doctrine of the deity of Christ, that, however satisfactorily it may be explained, and however well it may be reconciled with that fundamental principle of religion to which the Jews were so strongly attached—the doctrine of the Unity of God—yet it does, or may, at first sight, appear somewhat inconsistent with it. From the time of the Jew who is represented, by Justin Martyr, as disputing with him, about the middle of the second century, to the present period, it has always been regarded by the unbelieving Jews with abhorrence. They have considered the Christians as no better than idolaters; as denying the first truth of religion. But the unbelieving Jews, in the time of the

Apostles, opposed Christianity with the utmost bitterness and passion ; they sought on every side for objections to it. There was much in its character to which the believing Jews could hardly be reconciled. The Epistles are full of statements, explanations, and controversy, relating to questions having their origin in Jewish prejudices and passions. With regard, however, to this doctrine, which, if it had been taught, the believing Jews must have received with the utmost difficulty, and to which the unbelieving Jews would have manifested the most determined opposition—with regard to this doctrine, there is no trace of any controversy. But, if it had ever been taught, it must have been the main point of attack and defence between those who assailed and those who supported Christianity. There is nothing ever said in its explanation. But it must have required, far more than any other doctrine, to be explained, illustrated, and enforced ; for it appears not only irreconcilable with the Unity of God, but equally so with that of the humanity of our Saviour ; and yet both these doctrines, it seems, were to be maintained in connexion with it. It must have been necessary, therefore, to state it as clearly as possible, to exhibit it in its relations, and carefully to guard against the misapprehensions to which it is so liable on every side. Especially must care have been taken to prevent the gross mistakes into which the Gentile converts from polytheism were likely to fall. Yet, so far from any such clearness of statement and fulness of explanation, the whole language of the New Testament, in relation to this subject, is (as I have before said) a series of enigmas, upon the supposition of its truth. The doctrine, then, is never defended in the New Testament, though, unquestionably, it would have been the main object of attack, and the main difficulty in the Christian system. It is never explained, though no doctrine could have been so much in need of explanation. On the contrary, upon the supposition of its truth, the Apostles express themselves in such a manner, that, if it had been their purpose to darken and perplex the subject, they could not have done it more effectually. And, still more, this doctrine is never insisted upon as a necessary article of faith ; though it is now represented by its defenders as lying at the foundation of Christianity.



With a few exceptions, the passages in which it is imagined to be taught are introduced incidentally, the attention of the writer being principally directed to some other topic, and can be regarded only as accidental notices of it. It appears, then, that while other questions of far less difficulty (for instance, the circumcision of the Gentile converts) were subjects of such doubt and controversy, that even the authority of the Apostles was barely sufficient to establish the truth, this doctrine, so extraordinary, so obnoxious, and so hard to be understood, was introduced in silence, and received without hesitation, dislike, opposition, or misapprehension. There are not many propositions to be proved or disproved merely by moral evidence which are more incredible\*.”—*Ib.* pp. 37-40.

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#### ON THE INTERPRETATION OF LANGUAGE.

“Supposing the doctrines maintained by Trinitarians to be capable of proof, the state of the case between them and their opponents would be this: They quote certain texts, and explain them in a sense which, as they believe, supports their opinions. We maintain that the words were intended to express a very different meaning. How is the question to be decided? We do not deny that there are certain expressions in these texts which, nakedly considered, *will bear* a Trinitarian sense; how is it then to be ascertained whether this sense or some other was intended by the writer?

“In order to answer this question, it is necessary to enter into some explanation concerning the nature of language, and the principles of interpretation. The art of interpretation derives its origin from the *intrinsic ambiguity of language*. What I mean to express by this term is the fact, that a very large portion of sentences, *considered in themselves*, that is, *if regard be*

\* This consideration, since it presented itself to me, long before I saw it thus luminously developed by Professor Norton, carried full conviction to my mind.—J. B. W.

*had merely to the words of which they are composed*, are capable of expressing not one meaning only, but two or more different meanings; or (to state this fact in other terms) that in very many cases, the same sentence, like the same single word, may be used to express various and often very different senses. Now in a great part of what we find written concerning the interpretation of language, and in a large portion of the specimens of criticism which we meet with, especially upon the Scriptures, this fundamental truth, this fact which lies at the very bottom of the art of interpretation, has either been overlooked, or not regarded in its relations and consequences. It may be illustrated by a single example. St. John thus addresses the Christians to whom he was writing, in his first Epistle, ii, 20 :—‘ *Ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and know all things.*’

“If we consider these words in themselves merely, we shall perceive how uncertain is their signification, and how many different meanings they may be used to express. The first clause, ‘Ye have an anointing from the Holy One,’ may signify,

“1. *Through the favour of God, ye have become Christians or believers in Christ*; anointing being a ceremony of consecration, and Christians being considered as consecrated and set apart from the rest of mankind.

“2. Or it may mean, *Ye have been truly sanctified in heart and life*; a figure borrowed from outward consecration being used to denote inward holiness.

“3. Or, *Ye have been endued with miraculous powers*: consecrated as prophets and teachers in the Christian community.

“4. Or, *Ye have been well instructed in the truths of Christianity*. (See *Wetstein’s Notes* on this passage, and on 1st Tim. iv, 7.)

“I forbear to mention other meanings, which the word *anointing* might be used to express. These are sufficient for our purpose.

“The term *Holy One*, in such a relation as it holds to the other words in the present sentence, may denote either God, or Christ, or some other being.

“*Ye know all things*, literally expresses the meaning, *ye have the attribute of omniscience*. Beside this meaning, it may sig-

nify, *ye are fully acquainted with all the objects of human knowledge*; or, *ye know every truth connected with Christianity*; or, *ye have all the knowledge necessary to form your faith and direct your conduct*: or the proposition may require some other limitation; for *all things*, is one of those terms the meaning of which is continually to be restrained and modified by a regard to the subject present to the mind of the writer.

“This statement may afford some imperfect notion of the various senses which the words before us may be used to express; and of the uncertainty that must exist about their meaning, when they are regarded without reference to those considerations by which it ought to be determined. I say, imperfect, because we have really kept one very important consideration in mind, that they were written by an Apostle to a Christian community. Putting this out of view, it would not be easy to fix the limit of their possible meanings. It must be remembered that this passage has been adduced merely by way of illustration; and that, if it were necessary, an indefinite number of similar examples might be quoted.”

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It is absolutely necessary to stop in this selection, by doing violence to the feeling of delight and admiration which invites the selector to proceed, as he turns page after page. Let no sincere Christian deceive himself into a persuasion that he has done justice to the question between the Unitarians and the Orthodox till he has impartially studied Professor Norton's REASONS. This praise, however, is not meant to be exclusive: on the contrary, I am of opinion, that, in many cases, it would be difficult to decide whether that work, or Mr. Yates's VINDICATION, mentioned in my Preface, would be preferable.

## APPENDIX II.

*Passages of Scripture which have been alleged to prove the former Existence of an apostolical Creed, explained.*

MANY of my readers will require no apology for a rather long quotation from the CONFSSIONAL of Archdeacon Blackburne; a book which is now seldom in the hands of theological students, though the ability and learning it displays against the abuse of ecclesiastical power will, at all times, deserve the praise of every lover of *spiritual* freedom. I shall take also the liberty of inserting the paragraph which leads to the subject of this Appendix.

“ I cannot leave this view of the connexion between these two prelates *Tillotson* and *Burnet*, without a short reflection on these *trimming* methods in matters of religion. When were they ever known to succeed? And where were they ever known to conciliate the mind of any one of those unreasonable zealots to whose humour they were accommodated? We of this generation\* have lived to see how greatly Archbishop *Tillotson* was mistaken, in thinking to win over the high churchmen of those days by his healing expedients. His gentle, lenitive spirit was to their bigotry what oil is to the fire. Bishop *Burnet*’s friendship for the Archbishop carried him into these measures, contrary to his natural bent, and in mere complaisance to the Archbishop’s apprehensions of a storm, which he dreaded above all other things. And I remember to have heard some old men rejoice, that *Burnet* was kept down by *Tillotson*’s influence from pushing the reformation of the church to an extremity that might have endangered the government itself. Some of these men, however, might have remembered, that, when the Archbishop was no longer at hand to temper *Burnet*’s impetuosity, the latter had prudence sufficient to balance his courage, and to keep him from attempting what he had sense enough to perceive was impracticable.

“ \* I believe the edition of the *Confessional* I am using (1766) is the earliest.

But, after all, what has been the consequence of *Tillotson's* gentleness and *Burnet's* complaisance for the times? Even this; these two eminent lights of the English Church could not have been more opposed while they lived, or more abused and vilified since they died, had they firmly and vigorously promoted, at all adventures, the reformation in the Church of *England*, which they were both of them deeply conscious she very much wanted. But, after all, if what Bishop *Burnet* has offered under all these disadvantages will not justify the Church of *England* in requiring subscription to the 39 Articles, we may venture to conclude, without any just imputation of temerity, that this service will hardly be more effectually performed by men of another stamp, who may probably engage in it with more alacrity and less circumspection. What the good Bishop has said on this behalf (on Subscription) we now proceed to consider.

“ His Lordship begins with stating the seeming impropriety ‘of making such a collection of tenets the standard of the doctrine of a Church that (according to his Lordship) is deservedly valued by reason of her moderation. This (says the Bishop) seems to be a departing from the simplicity of the first ages, which yet we set up for a pattern\*.’

“ This objected impropriety (which, by the way, his Lordship exceedingly strengthens and illustrates by an induction of particulars) he rather endeavours to palliate and excuse, or, as he terms it, *explain*, than to deny or confute. He gives us an historical recital of the practice of former times, to shew that our Church acts after a precedent of long standing. To this no other answer is necessary, than that this was the practice of times which were not remarkable either for their *moderation* or *simplicity*, and of whose example the Church of *England* cannot avail herself, consistently with her pretensions to these two amiable qualities†.

\* Introduction, p. 1.

† To illustrate this truth, *Dr. Mosheim's Compendious View of Ecclesiastical History* may be consulted, from the time of *Constantine* downwards; and with greater advantage, in *Dr. Maclaine's* English translation lately published.—*Note in the “ Confessional.”*

“ But it seems this practice was originally the practice of the Apostles ; a consideration which will not only authorize our imitation, but strongly imply the utility and edification of the thing itself.

“ ‘ There was a form (says his Lordship) settled very early in most churches. This St. Paul, in one place, calls *The form of doctrine that was delivered*; in another place, *The form of sound words*, which those, who were fixed by the Apostles in particular churches, had received from them. These words of his do import a *standard* or *fixed formulary*, by which all doctrines were to be examined\*.’

“ The passages here referred to are Rom. vi, 17 ; 1st Tim. iv, 6, to which are added, in the margin, 1st Tim. vi, 3 ; 2d Tim. i, 13 ; and the Greek words in these several passages, which are supposed to signify this *standard* or *fixed formulary*, run thus :—*Τυπος διδαχης*—*ὑποτυπωσις ὑγιαίνοντων λογων*—*Λογοι πιστεως, και καλης διδασκαλιας*—*ὑγιαίνοντες λογοι, οἱ του Κυριου ἡμων Ιησου Χριστου, και η̑ κατ̑ ἐϋσεβειαν διδασκαλια*.

“ Now, when a capable and unprejudiced reader considers the variety of expression in these several passages, he will probably be inclined to think, that a *fixed formulary* of doctrine is the last thing a plain man would look for in them. A *fixed formulary*, one would think, should have a *fixed title*. Nor is it at all probable, that one and the same form of words should be described in terms which may denote an hundred different forms.

“ To enter into a just criticism on these expressions would be tedious and unnecessary. Suffice it to observe, after very competent judges, that *τυπος διδαχης* and *ὑποτυπωσις ὑγιαίνοντων λογων*, appear to refer rather to the *exemplification* of the Christian doctrine in the *practice* of pious believers than to any *form of words*. The *doctrine* is *one* thing, and the *type* of the doctrine *another*. The doctrine is and must be expressed by, and consequently contained in, *some* form of words. But the *type* of that *form* must be something different from the form itself ; and the general acceptation of the word *τυπος* points out the *practical exemplification* of the doctrine to be the thing here intended. The text, Rom. vi, 17, is, it must be owned, obscure.

\* Introduction, p. 2.

and difficult; but without giving this sense to the words τυπος διδαχης, it is absolutely unintelligible\*. And whatever is the signification of τυπος here, must be the meaning of ὑποτυωσις, 2d Tim. i, 13†.

“Again, the literal English of ὑγιαίνοντες λογοι, is *healing or salutary words*; that is, the words of salvation or eternal life. Our translators have rendered the Greek participle by the equivocal words *sound* and *wholesome*, which signified, I suppose, in their ideas, the same as *orthodox*.

“If you ask where these *healing words* are to be found, I answer in the Scriptures; sometimes, perhaps, abridged and comprehended in some short summaries, which occur in Paul’s epistles to *Timothy* and *Titus*. But these are evidently not the *fixed formularies* his Lordship means, as the certain consequence of that must have been, that no man or body of men whatsoever could have had the least authority to add to them, or enlarge them in any future time.

“And if any other *standard* or *formulary* is meant, it then comes to our turn to ask the question, Where is it to be found? What is become of it? For that it should be lost, or drop into utter oblivion, if it once had a real existence, is wholly incredible.

“In answer to this demand, the Bishop gives us to understand, ‘that, by a *fixed formulary*, he does not mean *one precise* and invariable form of words, which he thinks improbable

\* “See *Grotius* and *Bengelius*’s *Gnomon* upon the place. τυπος. Typus, vestigium, figura, exemplar, forma. *Hen. Stephens*. Acts xxiii, 25, τυπος is the *literal copy* of *Lysias*’s epistle to *Felix*, not the sum or abridgment of it.”—*Note in the “Confessional.”*

† “The word is but once more to be found in the New Testament, viz. 1st Tim. i, 16. Where the Apostle says, *he found* mercy—προς ὅτι τυπωσιν τῶν μελόντων πιστευειν, &c., for a *pattern*; which is the same thing as an *example* of the doctrine of pardon and mercy, through Christ. In what sense the word τυπος was afterwards used, may be seen in *Mills*’s translation of *Brugs*’s *History of the Popes*, vol. i, p. 428; where an instrument or edict of the Emperor *Constans*, for the pacification of the disputes concerning the two wills of Christ, is called the *type*; which instrument contained no formulary of doctrine, but only enjoined that the parties at variance should abide by the Scriptures, the five œcumenical councils, and the plain and simple passages of the fathers.”—*Note in the “Confessional.”*

the Apostles should leave behind them. For his Lordship observes, that the first apologists for Christianity, when they deliver a short abstract of the Christian faith, do all vary from one another, both as to the order and as to the words themselves: Whence he thinks it more probable, that they received these short abstracts from the Apostles themselves with some variation.

“But, surely, the moment you admit of *variations*, not only the *idea* of a *fixed formulary*, but even the *use* of *any* formulary, as a *standard* or *test* of *all* doctrines, immediately vanishes away. There must be left in such *varying* formularies room for doubtful and precarious judgments; and the Scriptures alone, in such cases, must be the *dernier resort*. And if so, why might they not as well have been admitted to decide in the first instance?”—*The Confessional*, p. 66, et seq. The sequel of this passage, indeed the whole work, should be particularly studied in the present times.



## APPENDIX III.

*On the Old Testament as a supposed Standard of Orthodoxy.*

THE frequently quoted words of Paul (2d Tim. iii, 16, 17) will probably occur to many, as clearly opposing my statement. Let us consider those words, divesting ourselves of *established* prejudices. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

I have a few observations to lay before the dispassionate reader.

The Greek word *θεόπνευστος* is not only figurative, but may possibly represent two *figures*, which are the reverse of each other: something *breathed out by God*, and something *breathing out God*. It is true that the Lexicons, so far as I have been able to consult them, limit the word in question to the first signification. I am aware, also, that the best grammarians exclude from the class of compounds which are capable both of the active and the passive signification, (as *μητροκτονος, θεοτοκος*, marking the change by the accent) those which end in *τος*, probably because they are derived not from the middle but the *passive* preterit. But since such derivatives from the passive as *ἄπνευστος εὐπνευστος*, mean, *he that breathes not, he that breathes well*, the supposition that *θεόπνευστος* may signify *Deum spirans*, or, as it might be expressed in English, *breathing of God*, may be not well grounded, but it cannot be absurd. After all, it seems strange that the fact of *inspiration* should depend so much on a delicate point of grammatical criticism.

But I am not disposed to dispute that the Hebrew Scriptures (for it must not be forgotten that St. Paul speaks of those Scriptures alone, which Timothy knew "*from a child*," may be truly said to have been *breathed out by God*, *i. e.* to have had their origin in that peculiar providence which superintended the

moral education of the Jewish people; and much less will I deny the still more unquestionable fact, that those Scriptures *breathe out God*, i. e. godliness or piety, though the piety they breathe is not unfrequently mixed up with the gross and carnal feelings of which our Saviour accuses the Jewish nation; with that hardness of heart to which he expressly attributes the imperfections of Moses's laws.

In the next place, I request a serious attention to St. Paul's enumeration of the purposes for which he considers the Hebrew Scriptures as eminently useful. The impartial reader should, in his mind, compare, as he proceeds, the various parts of this enumeration with the pretended destination of those writings, to settle the disputes of *scientific* theology, and thus to fix *Orthodoxy*.

1. Those Scriptures, according to Paul, had the power to make Timothy (a Jew) *wise unto salvation through that faith which is in Christ Jesus*. That the Hebrew Scriptures were so ordained by Providence as to lead the upright, candid, and virtuous Jews to Christ, cannot be denied. 2. Those Scriptures are profitable for teaching (*διδασκαλίαν*). The Jews had, indeed, no other *national* means of instruction. 3. The Hebrew Scriptures are profitable for reproof (*ἐλεγχον*); and unquestionably, to a Jew, as long as the polity existed, in compliance with which Paul had circumcised Timothy (not for any value which Paul himself set on circumcision, but "because of the Jews\*"), the Hebrew Scriptures were the standard by which the conduct of every member of the nation, who had not arrived at the full conscientious conviction of the abolition of the law, through Christ, should be judged. 4. The Hebrew Scriptures are profitable for *correction* (*ἐπανόρθωσιν*) i. e. *setting right again*. This is a declaration almost identical with that immediately preceding. 5. The Hebrew Scriptures are profitable for instruction (*παιδείαν* i. e. *elementary* instruction) in righteousness (*δικαιοσύνη*), i. e. the correct conduct of a Jew; who, if he was observant of the law, was, in the language of the New Testament, called *δίκαιος*.

This more rhetorical than logical enumeration concludes with a sentence which, in general terms, expresses the *final end* of

\* Acts xvi, 3.

the advantages offered by the Hebrew Scriptures to a pious Jew ; namely, “ *that the man of God\**” (i. e. a man whose life, like that of the ancient prophets, is devoted to the object of spreading the principles and sentiments of piety) *may be* COMPETENT (ἀρτιος), *thoroughly furnished* (*fitted out*—ἐξηρτισμένος) for every good work (i. e. every duty of his office).

When the utmost shall have been done to increase the significance of every phrase in this passage, I wish the reader impartially to judge whether St. Paul’s *occasional* praise of the Hebrew Scriptures, and his list of the advantages which may be derived from them (especially by Jews, before the total abolition of their politico-religious constitution), can in a satisfactory manner prove that the Apostle was thinking of an *inspired verbal rule of faith*, by which *scientific* disputes in theology,—much less in physics, chronology, &c.—should be settled, as by the intervention of an oracle. Observe, however, how the Old Testament is used among us. Suppose a divine denies that the *literal* sense gives the true meaning of the beginning of Genesis. We instantly hear an indignant cry against the impiety of such a view. But why? Has St. Paul given us any rule to ascertain *to which of the senses* of every passage in Scripture it is that the word θεόπνευστος applies? And, since he has not, should we not take that omission as a proof that the word which the established version translates “*inspiration of God*,” means only a *general* derivation from God, which leaves the Christian at liberty to expound *individual* passages so as to prevent their opposing the *originally divine light of our* REASON, fully assisted by the SPIRIT of the Gospel? By what clear title does any man accuse another of impiety, when that man uses his intellectual liberty?

Were there a judge of the sense of Scripture, divinely appointed; were that appointment so made as to allow of no reasonable doubt; to act against the decisions of that judge, would deserve the condemnation to which clear offences against divine authority are liable. But, since we have been left to judge of the sense of the Scriptures *for ourselves*, every man, after exerting his means and faculties to the best of his power, must adhere to what he understands. He must, of course,

\* Compare 1st Sam. ix, 6; 1st Kings xiii, 6; 2d Kings i, 9.

think others *wrong* ; but, as he should remember his own liability to error, he ought to abstain from condemning them of sin and impiety. To act, as most divines act at present, is a most unchristian presumption.

The *Hebrew Scriptures* have the sanction of Christ and his Apostles as such ; *i. e.* as writings prepared through an especial providence of God for the benefit of the *Jewish people*, in conformity with the circumstances of that nation, and in reference to a higher dispensation—namely, the Gospel. Those Scriptures, accordingly, deserve a reverent study on the part of every Christian, in proportion to his individual capacity. But the value of those Scriptures is only *in reference* to the Gospel. The Providence which caused their existence must have intended them for *us*, only in order to *contribute* to a hearty acceptance of Christ as the Son of God, our supreme moral leader. With what colour of reason, then, can it be supposed that it is God's Will we should receive those books in such a sense as, in regard to millions of candid and well-disposed individuals all over the world, must necessarily preclude belief in Christ ? Such a supposition can only proceed from that fatal notion which represents FAITH as a sacrifice of REASON, and measures the value of that faith by the difficulty and extent of the sacrifice. What monstrous absurdity would be excluded by such FAITH ! But this is a subject which must be treated at full length—reverently, yet boldly : a note (however it may exceed the usual limits) can only touch it incidentally.

485

## NOTES.

## Note to LETTER I, Page 12.

## ON 2d JOHN, 7-11.

THE passages of Scripture which seem to give an appearance of probability to the essentially intolerant notion that Orthodoxy is necessary to salvation, or which (to speak more properly) disturb the conviction which Reason, enlightened by the Scriptures, is apt to produce against that notion in candid, unsuperstitious minds, are very few. This, by itself, is a strong proof, to me, that the intolerant interpretation commonly given to them cannot be true; for Providence would not have committed so important and practical a declaration to a few incidental expressions. In the Trinitarian question, especially, this consideration is to me more powerful than any direct interpretation of individual passages. But, in regard to our present subject, I think it necessary to draw the attention of the reader to that passage of the 2d Epistle of John, which I have constantly found to be the last refuge of intolerance defeated by argument. To save inquirers the trouble of seeking for the passage in the New Testament, I shall copy it here. I will also give in italics the expressions which appear to me to deserve particular attention.

Verse 6. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the *commandment* (namely, that we love one another—see v. 5, and John xiv, 15-21.) That as ye have heard from the beginning ye should walk in it. (V. 7), For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. (V. 8), Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. (V. 9), Whosoever transgresseth, and *abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God: He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.* (V. 10), *If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:* (v. 11), for he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds.”

I wish the reader to consider the great probability (to me, certainty) that the writer means the same thing by *commandment* ἐντολή as by διδάχη, doctrine. To be convinced of this, nothing more is necessary than to refer to v. 9, and compare it with v. 10, c. xv, and v. 23, c. xiv, of the Gospel of John. The reward of keeping Christ's words, commandments, or doctrine (for the context shews that they are various names given to the same thing—i. e. charity, love to God, and to one another) is the coming of the *Father and the Son* to him, and making their abode with him. The very same result is, in the Epistle, attributed, in less figurative words, to the keeping the doctrine of Christ. *He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son*; or is in full possession of Christianity, which consists not only in the acknowledgment of God, but in the acceptance of Christ as a guide to Him. From this comparison of passages, by keeping in mind the *practical* character which John gives to Christianity, and by remembering that he reduces it to love to God, as known through Christ, and to our brethren, for the sake of the love which Christ deserves from us, we may be convinced that nothing was farther from the Evangelist's thoughts than the condemnation of *theoretical* doctrines. What he condemns is the *denial* of the existence of Christ, and the consequent denial of his *doctrine*, his *great commandment*, his *peculiar doctrine of love to God and man*; that love which necessarily produces moral obedience.

And here I must observe the unjustifiable rendering of v. 7, "deceivers.. who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. The Greek participle present *ἡρξαμεν*, (Lat. *venientem*) has evidently the force of an adjective in this place. If the writer had wished to express the meaning given in the translation, he must have used another tense. The difference is most important. The translation should be, *not confessing* (or not acknowledging) *him who is come in the flesh, Jesus Christ*:—literally, Jesus Christ, the *coming* in the flesh. Thus every thing is plain and consistent. John is not concerned with metaphysical and mystic doctrines. Such as deny the *existence of the man, Christ*, whose love to mankind is the great acting spring of the new doctrine (*διδάχνη*); those, who, probably in consequence of that theory, which induced others to say that the *resurrection was past*, denied that Christ had existed, and made the whole of Christianity a *figurative, moral fable*; such men were true *Antichrists*, destroyers of Christianity, and should be carefully avoided by the Christian congregations, when, as preachers, as men who carried about the doctrine (see v. 10) they claimed those rights of *maintenance and encouragement\** which (as we find in St. Paul's Epistles) were considered to be the right of the true apostles and messengers of the Gospel†.

If, after all, it should be contended that what St. John condemns is an *abstract doctrine*, I answer that (though I consider such an objection as a *cavil*) I will grant that the *abstract doctrine* (if it must be so called) that Jesus Christ did not exist, is condemned by an apostle; and I cordially join in the condemnation. But if, encouraged by this instance, any one who is not an Apostle, wishes to apply the same condemnation to other abstract doctrines, I must decline his authority.

### Note to LETTER IV, p. 72.

#### ON THE SPIRITUAL ASSISTANCE PROMISED BY CHRIST.

WHATEVER may be the means by which the assistance which, under the name Holy Spirit, is promised to sincere Christians, the effect must appear in the character of *reasonable motives*, operating upon the will. The *mystical* signification which the term *spiritual* has had, for ages, among most Christians, cannot be proved to have been intended by the writers of the New Testament, who evidently used it in sense of *mental or intellectual*. Much less is there any ground for supposing the assistance in question, miraculous. The established laws of our intellectual and moral nature, and the nature of the Christian principle, seem quite sufficient for the fulfilment of the promise of Christ. "Every one that asketh receiveth: and he that seeketh findeth: and to him that knocketh it shall be opened," are (as we may infer from the manner of the assertion) established laws of the moral world; yet they mean the same thing as the promise of assistance. The whole view of the subject is beautifully brought to one point, in the affecting words of Christ, as recorded in Luke xi, 13, "If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." An assistance which so regularly and *naturally* flows from the character of our heavenly Father, cannot be supposed to be bestowed by occasional and extraordinary exertions of divine power. It must take place as an established law, whenever the free moral agent, man, shall fulfil the conditions required.

\* Observe attentively what is forbidden in v. 11, viz. *lodging and encouragement*.

† See 2d Tim. ii, 18; 1st Thess. ii, 6.













